



# **NAVAL POSTGRADUATE SCHOOL**

**MONTEREY, CALIFORNIA**

## **THESIS**

**THE INFLUENCE OF KEY INTERNATIONAL ACTORS (U.S.-E.U.)  
AND KEMALISTS ON TURKEY'S ATTITUDE TOWARD  
ITS KURDISH MINORITY**

by

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June 2008

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<b>REPORT DOCUMENTATION PAGE</b>			<i>Form Approved OMB No. 0704-0188</i>	
Public reporting burden for this collection of information is estimated to average 1 hour per response, including the time for reviewing instruction, searching existing data sources, gathering and maintaining the data needed, and completing and reviewing the collection of information. Send comments regarding this burden estimate or any other aspect of this collection of information, including suggestions for reducing this burden, to Washington headquarters Services, Directorate for Information Operations and Reports, 1215 Jefferson Davis Highway, Suite 1204, Arlington, VA 22202-4302, and to the Office of Management and Budget, Paperwork Reduction Project (0704-0188) Washington DC 20503.				
<b>1. AGENCY USE ONLY (Leave blank)</b>		<b>2. REPORT DATE</b> June 2008	<b>3. REPORT TYPE AND DATES COVERED</b> Master's Thesis	
<b>4. TITLE AND SUBTITLE</b> The Influence of Key International Actors (U.S.-E.U.) and Kemalists on Turkey's Attitude Toward Its Kurdish Minority			<b>5. FUNDING NUMBERS</b>	
<b>6. AUTHOR(S)</b> Oikonomopoulos, Panagiotis				
<b>7. PERFORMING ORGANIZATION NAME(S) AND ADDRESS(ES)</b> Naval Postgraduate School Monterey, CA 93943-5000			<b>8. PERFORMING ORGANIZATION REPORT NUMBER</b>	
<b>9. SPONSORING /MONITORING AGENCY NAME(S) AND ADDRESS(ES)</b> N/A			<b>10. SPONSORING/MONITORING AGENCY REPORT NUMBER</b>	
<b>11. SUPPLEMENTARY NOTES</b> The views expressed in this thesis are those of the author and do not reflect the official policy or position of the Department of Defense or the U.S. Government.				
<b>12a. DISTRIBUTION / AVAILABILITY STATEMENT</b> Approved for public release; distribution is unlimited			<b>12b. DISTRIBUTION CODE</b>	
<b>13. ABSTRACT (maximum 200 words)</b> <p>This thesis seeks to examine the way key international actors (U.S.-E.U.) and the Kemalists have shaped and currently influence Turkey's attitude toward its Kurdish minority. The tough negotiations on Turkey's accession to the E.U. since 2005, and the de facto establishment of an autonomous Kurdish entity in northern Iraq following the 2003 U.S. military intervention, have brought the Kurds' plight into the limelight. These developments have involved the United States and the E.U. in the management of Turkey's Kurdish question to an unprecedented extent. The research demonstrates that Turkey's concessions to the Kurds in the 2000s have been moderate and that Ankara is still reluctant to recognize the existence of a Kurdish minority that deserves special rights. The research also reveals that, despite U.S. rhetoric concerning human rights and the treatment of the Kurds, the United States, in line with the rationalists' approach, keeps viewing Turkish-U.S. strategic partnership as vital to America's interests. The E.U.'s socialization strategy seeks to reform Turkey's human rights regime, as the Europeans have reached the conclusion that Turkey's Kurdish question is an issue of denied cultural rights, as opposed to an issue of forced assimilation.</p>				
<b>14. SUBJECT TERMS</b> Turkey, United States, European Union, Kurds			<b>15. NUMBER OF PAGES</b> 107	
			<b>16. PRICE CODE</b>	
<b>17. SECURITY CLASSIFICATION OF REPORT</b> Unclassified	<b>18. SECURITY CLASSIFICATION OF THIS PAGE</b> Unclassified	<b>19. SECURITY CLASSIFICATION OF ABSTRACT</b> Unclassified	<b>20. LIMITATION OF ABSTRACT</b> UU	

NSN 7540-01-280-5500

Standard Form 298 (Rev. 2-89)  
Prescribed by ANSI Std. Z39-18

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ITS KURDISH MINORITY**

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Submitted in partial fulfillment of the  
requirements for the degree of

**MASTER OF ARTS IN SECURITY STUDIES  
(MIDDLE EAST, SOUTH ASIA, SUB-SAHARAN AFRICA)**

from the

**NAVAL POSTGRADUATE SCHOOL  
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## **ABSTRACT**

This thesis seeks to examine the way key international actors (U.S.-E.U.) and the Kemalists have shaped and currently influence Turkey's attitude toward its Kurdish minority. The tough negotiations on Turkey's accession to the E.U. since 2005, and the de facto establishment of an autonomous Kurdish entity in northern Iraq following the 2003 U.S. military intervention, have brought the Kurds' plight into the limelight. These developments have involved the United States and the E.U. in the management of Turkey's Kurdish question to an unprecedented extent. The research demonstrates that Turkey's concessions to the Kurds in the 2000s have been moderate and that Ankara is still reluctant to recognize the existence of a Kurdish minority that deserves special rights. The research also reveals that, despite U.S. rhetoric concerning human rights and the treatment of the Kurds, the United States, in line with the rationalists' approach, keeps viewing Turkish-U.S. strategic partnership as vital to America's interests. The E.U.'s socialization strategy seeks to reform Turkey's human rights regime, as the Europeans have reached the conclusion that Turkey's Kurdish question is an issue of denied cultural rights, as opposed to an issue of forced assimilation.

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## **ACKNOWLEDGMENTS**

The author wants to thank Professor Kadhim and Professor Baylouny for their guidance and patience during the work in performing this research.

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## I. INTRODUCTION

The question of how key actors of the international community (U.S.-E.U.) and elements of the Turkish bureaucracy (Army-Kemalists) have shaped and currently influence Turkey's attitude toward its Kurdish minority has preoccupied the academic community since the 1980s. Important developments in Turkey and the Middle East, such as the launching of the campaign of Kurdistan Workers' Party (PKK) against the Turkish state in 1984 and the dramatic capture of its leader in 1999, tough negotiations on Turkey's accession to the E.U. since 2005, and the de facto establishment of an autonomous Kurdish entity in northern Iraq following the 2003 U.S. military intervention, have brought the Kurds' recurring plight into the limelight. These developments have involved the United States and the E.U. in the management of the Kurdish question, particularly in Turkey, to an unprecedented extent.

What role does the international community have in domestic Turkish politics? The question is of interest to policymakers and theorists alike. Policymakers are interested in identifying the impact of their efforts on specific policies, and theorists have long debated the relative weight of domestic or international variables in domestic policy. This thesis seeks to address these questions through an analysis of the interaction between the international community, the Turkish bureaucracy, and Turkish policy toward the Kurds.

The United States' focus on the fate of the Kurds in Turkey has fluctuated depending on broader political factors. Primary sources, such as Lokman I. Meho's *Documentary Sourcebook* on Congressional records and the State Department's correspondence regarding the role of the Kurds in the Middle East, reveal that the United States has been involved in Kurdish affairs since the 1940s. Until the late 1980s, the Americans viewed Kurdish nationalism in Turkey through a Cold War lens. They suspected that the Soviets had the ability to manipulate the Kurdish communities and mobilize them against their host states whenever they deemed it necessary. In that

context, the U.S. viewed Turkey as a frontline state whose integrity and stability had to be preserved. Turkey's forced assimilation of the Kurds and its denial of their cultural rights were not on the White House's agenda.

However, in the 1990s, Washington's policies changed. The Clinton administration's rhetoric regarding human rights and the protection of minorities, as well as the U.S. Congress's growing criticism of Turkey's Kurdish policies, made Turkey understand that ignoring the Americans' human rights concerns was no longer an option. The Turks concluded that some reforms were necessary in order to convince their allies that the country's democratic polity guaranteed equal civic rights to all its citizens.

Research reveals that the United States never stopped considering the territorial integrity of Turkey as key to Middle Eastern stability. The Americans were careful to suggest moderate reforms that would "recognize" the cultural rights of the Kurds without undermining Turkey's Kemalist legacy, and actively contributed to the fight against the PKK's terrorist threat through intelligence sharing and material assistance; the U.S. is also alleged to have contributed to Ocalan's capture. The United States labeled the PKK as a terrorist organization much earlier than the Europeans, while the Marxist-Leninist ideology of the group had already placed the group in the anti-western camp. In any case, the general U.S. policy toward Turkey has been supportive; its pressure on Turkey on the human rights front has been less aggressive when compared with the respective policy of the E.U.

This thesis argues that the U.S. stance vis-à-vis the Kurdish question in Turkey has been primarily dictated by the needs of U.S. policy regarding the wider Middle East. Turkey's geo-strategic location has been central to the planning and support of important U.S. operations in the Middle East both before and after the end of the Cold War. However, the U.S. need to maintain a strong working relationship with Ankara does not mean that the Americans are indifferent to internal developments in southeastern Anatolia. On the contrary, the pacification of Turkey's Kurdish region is important to U.S. interests, in the sense that it will eliminate a serious source of instability within Turkey, curb support to the PKK's campaign by the Kurdish community in southeastern

Turkey, safeguard essential energy routes for the West which cross Kurdish-populated areas in Anatolia, and enable the United States to focus its attention to other fronts in the Middle East.

Europe has failed so far to articulate an unambiguous strategy toward Turkey. Although E.U.-Turkish negotiations regarding Turkey's full membership into the European structures have been underway since 2005, key European countries, including France and Germany, keep stressing that a relationship of "privileged partners" would be more appropriate. The E.U. has not yet made a decision whether Turkey should be considered a strategic partner or not. Nevertheless, the political and economic stability in Turkey are valued by Europe as significant to its own politico-economic security. Thus, a basic element of Europe's strategy is to anchor Turkey to Europe, even if not as a full member.

In that context, Turkey's poor human rights record and the shortcomings of its legal system have come under serious scrutiny by the European establishment. However, the present research reveals that the Kurdish question is not viewed by the E.U. as an issue of denied minority rights and forced assimilation; on the contrary, it is approached as an issue of human rights abuses by Turkey's quasi-democratic political culture.

In general, the author of this thesis argues that the size of the Turkish economy, the undeniable geo-strategic importance of Turkey's location in conjunction with the growing engagement of the U.S. in the Middle East, and prospects of lucrative arms deals to meet the needs of the Turkish army mean that neither Europe or the United States can afford to marginalize Turkey solely on the grounds of its poor human rights record and the repression of its Kurdish community.

As far as the proponents of Turkey's official ideology, Kemalism, are concerned, the research reveals that, since the 1920s, the Kemalists sought to transform the Turkish society along European lines. Scholars such as Michael Gunter, David McDowall, Kevin McKiernan, Robert Olson, and Martin Van Bruinessen have extensively written about the Turkish establishment's unitary policies which allowed neither the recognition of the society's multiethnic character nor the attachment to "backward" Islamic values.

The Kemalists' decision to deny special minority privileges to the Kurds was taken sometime in 1923. Surprisingly, in the time frame between 1920 and 1922, Kemal Atatürk's administration had explored the possibility of granting the status of limited autonomy to Turkey's Kurdish provinces. Indeed, in 1922, the Turkish Grand National Assembly (GNA) had discussed a draft plan which provided for the election of a Kurdish National Assembly by universal suffrage. The official language of the autonomous entity was expected to be Turkish; however, the use of the Kurdish language was encouraged.<sup>1</sup> The Turkish establishment backed out when it became apparent that the proposed administrative plan could lead to further territorial losses for Turkey in the future.

After the "Sevres syndrome" had dictated the decision to eliminate Kurdish nationalism, the state remained focused on that central principle of Kemalism, irrespective of the nature of the governing coalitions. Moreover, after the 1980 coup, the army proclaimed itself the guardian of Kemal's legacy and rejected all plans regarding concessions to the Kurdish community.

The various phases of Kurdish history, as discussed in the chapters to follow, leads to the conclusion that the fate of Kurdistan throughout the centuries has been shaped by the imperatives of the national interests of external forces. Apart from limited periods of self-rule by dynasties of Kurdish origin, Kurdistan had successively been under the control of the Arabs, the Safavids, and the Ottomans, the latter being the most influential in shaping the Kurdish administrative structure. Governance in Kurdistan periodically changed from direct rule under foreign administrators, especially during the Mongol and Safavid conquests, to self-rule by the traditional notable families of Kurdistan with a considerable degree of autonomy in the Ottoman period. During the last decades of the declining Ottoman state, the challenges of the West led to the introduction of power-centralization policies, which in turn eliminated many of the privileges (administrative autonomy) enjoyed by the Kurdish principalities.

However, during all the historical periods and under all conquerors, the tendencies toward self-governance and management of local affairs never ceased to arise. The tribal organization of Kurdistan since the pre-Islamic period, based on the authority

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<sup>1</sup> David McDowall, *A Modern History of the Kurds* (New York: St Martin's Press, 1996), 189.



of local chieftains, and the sense of otherness always led to revolts or political alliances that sought to preserve the notables' status quo. Indeed, Kurdish notables used to pledge allegiance to the Ottomans or the Safavids, or switch their loyalties accordingly, on the grounds of material gains and promises of authority on local affairs. The Kurdish notables were also instrumental in the emergence of Kurdish nationalism when the disintegration of the Ottoman Empire became inevitable.

This thesis asserts that the early Kurdish nationalist movement of the late 19<sup>th</sup> century was influenced by other nationalist movements of that time period such as those of the Balkan countries. However, the Islamic bond between the Kurds and the Ottomans, absent in the Balkan cases, should not be downplayed. On the contrary, it was this religious bond, along with long-lasting rivalries between the leading Kurdish families that fragmented the Kurdish nationalist movement.

It is hard to argue whether Kurdish nationalism was fueled by pure nationalist idealism or by the desire to preserve the old tradition of self-rule, even under the supervision of an external actor. The line between these two arguments seems blurred. However, it may be argued that the old tribal organization of the Kurds cultivated diverse political loyalties and orientations and, subsequently, strong rivalries between Kurdish families, which undermined the chance of establishing a unified leadership and promote the Kurdish agenda. When a movement is unable to speak with one voice, it is easier to suppress it, and that is the Kurds' case.

#### **A. THEORETICAL CONTEXT: HOW INTERNATIONAL ACTORS INFLUENCE DOMESTIC ARRANGEMENTS**

Before discussing the policies of the Kemalists, Americans, and Europeans vis-à-vis the Kurdish question in Turkey, it is necessary to examine the theoretical framework under which international actors may influence domestic political arrangements in a sovereign state. There has been a long-lasting debate among scholars of political science on that subject, with the constructivists and rationalists leading the debate.

## 1. Social Constructivism

Advocates of social constructivism, such as Martha Finnemore, Kathryn Sikkink, Emanuel Alder, Thomas Risse, Stephen Ropp, and Jeffrey Checkel, argue that states participate in networks of transnational social relations that shape their understanding of the world and their role in it.<sup>2</sup> Socialization is a process of introducing newcomers to the norms and rules governing a specific community or social group.<sup>3</sup> States are socialized by international actors, such as international organizations, to re-define their interests, and to accept new political goals and values which have considerable impact on the structure of the states themselves. Their interests are shaped by internationally held norms and understandings about what is appropriate or inappropriate. The new rules are taken for granted because they are understood as “normal.”<sup>4</sup> International actors have the power to “create” interests, change states’ preferences, and teach their decision-makers. This normative context affects the behavior of policy-makers and of public opinion, which may restrict the freedom of action of those policy-makers. The normative context can change over time, creating relevant shifts in state interests and behavior.

The reasoning of the social constructivists’ proposition is based on the observation that, in most cases, states pursue goals that do not result from external pressures or demands by domestic groups. Instead, these goals are shaped by internationally-accepted norms and values. These norms create obligations that states find it unnatural to deviate from. A state is itself a socially constructed unit under continuous evolution. So, when it re-defines its interests through international socialization, its nature and identity change, too. Finnemore rejects the rationalists’ argument that states simply pursue power and wealth - the black-box approach - because these goals have no meaning whatsoever if they are not defined by widely-understood social values and social

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<sup>2</sup> Martha Finnemore, *National Interests in International Society* (Ithaca, N.Y.: Cornell University Press, 1996), 2-3.

<sup>3</sup> Robert Lauer and Warren Handel, *Social Psychology: The Theory and Application of Symbolic Interactionism* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1977).

<sup>4</sup> Jeffrey Checkel, *“Going Native” in Europe?* (Oslo: Arena Press, 2001).

interaction.<sup>5</sup> While the rationalists would argue that different actors with different interests behave differently, Finnemore observes that international norms of behavior make different actors act in a similar manner.

## **2. Rationalists**

The rationalist approach, exemplified by the thinking of neo-realists such as Krasner, Walt, and Waltz, suggest that state interests and preferences derive from objective conditions and the material characteristics of a state.<sup>6</sup> Any change in policy vis-à-vis the national interest is attributed to changes in these conditions and characteristics. In other words, the policy change is the result of pressure by domestic interest groups, which have been affected by changes in the material conditions in the country. In that sense, the primary source of state interest is found inside the state boundaries rather than outside. Even in cases of state security and inter-state relations, the preference for security is inherent in the state, and the decision-making process is independent of international influences.

For neo-realists, politics remain in the domestic arena of states. Due to the absence of a controlling political authority in the international system, the international domain is the field of an eternal struggle for states to maximize their security. Whatever their political systems, states respond to the logic of anarchy, balancing in response to the changes in the distribution of material power in the international system.<sup>7</sup>

Waltz has also talked about the socialization process of states, but he understands this process as the emulation of the behavior of the most successful actors in the international system, in order for a state to survive in its anarchic environment.<sup>8</sup> Imitating the successful policies of another state is a perfectly rational strategy to adopt. For

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<sup>5</sup> Finnemore, *National Interests in International Society*, 5.

<sup>6</sup> Stephen D. Krasner, *Defending the National Interest: Raw Materials Investments and U.S. Foreign Policy* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1978); Stephen Walt, *The Origins of Alliances: Superpower and Regional Diplomacy in the Middle East, 1955-1979* (Berkeley: University of California, 1983); Kenneth Waltz, *Theory of International Politics* (Reading, Mass.: Addison-Wesley Publications, 1979).

<sup>7</sup> Walt, *The Origins of Alliances*.

<sup>8</sup> Waltz, *Theory of International Politics*, 127-129.

example, John Ikenberry has documented the adoption of British and Japanese privatization policies by policy-makers in other governments trying to counter the fiscal crises in the late 1970s.<sup>9</sup>

In general, neo-realist thinking has moved away from the concept of norm internalization. Schimmelfennig has argued that norms are resources or constraints to be manipulated by rational actors. In his words,

both socializers and states to be socialized weight up the costs and benefits of socialization and internalization in light of their predefined political goals and decide, on this basis, whether to engage in socialization (socializers), or to adopt the community norms and transform them into domestic rules (the socializees).<sup>10</sup>

From the rationalists' point of view, the socialization process may only take place when there are benefits, such as promises of rewards for compliance with norms, or the threat of sanctions in response to deviations from normative standards. The actors being socialized agree to change their behavior to conform to international norms to the extent that the benefits of compliance are greater than the costs of resistance.

### **3. Evaluation**

The debate between scholars of international relations theory on the influence of international actors on domestic policies leads to the conclusion that external influence is indeed possible under certain conditions. Specifically, both constructivists and rationalists agree that external actors can affect arrangements in the domestic realm, though they mention different conditions. The constructivists are much more optimistic about the ability of external actors, mainly in the form of international organizations, to socialize states and change their perceptions about national interests, create new interests, and teach leaders and public opinion about the external actors' definitions of right or wrong. The rationalists are much more restrained, arguing that national interests are shaped primarily by the interaction of domestic groups. International actors can exert

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<sup>9</sup> G. John Ikenberry, "The International Spread of Privatization Policies, Learning and Policy Bandwagoning," in *The Political Economy of Public Sector Reform and Privatization*, ed. Ezra N. Suleiman and John Waterbury (Boulder: Westview Press, 1990), 88-110.

<sup>10</sup> Frank Schimmelfennig, *International Socialization in Europe* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2006), 3.

influence on domestic arrangements only if they can promise rewards for compliance with the internationally-held norms, or threaten sanctions for deviations from those norms.

The author of this thesis asserts that the European Union has resorted to intense socialization with Turkey's elites as a way to convince the Turkish government to enact new laws or abolish obsolete regulations that would bring the country's human rights regime in line with fundamental European norms. The prospect of E.U. accession, which is associated with economic prosperity and membership in one of the world's most influential clubs, has already triggered important reforms in Turkey and has forced the political-military establishment to acknowledge Turkey's "Kurdish reality."

Official E.U. documents that are presented in the following chapters, including the Accession Partnership document of March 2001, the 2005 negotiating framework, and the yearly reports on Turkey's progress since 2006, and also the rhetoric of the Commission's representatives, show that the goal of E.U. socialization is by no means to force Turkey to recognize the right of its Kurdish community to secede or establish an autonomous entity; on the contrary, it seeks to persuade the Turkish establishment to grant basic political, linguistic, and cultural rights to the Kurds. It is worth noting that the E.U. does not understand the Kurdish question as an issue of forced assimilation, but rather as one of human rights abuses and terrorism (by the PKK). However, the power of E.U. socialization has its limits, for, as long as Europe fails to clarify its intentions regarding the prospect of full E.U. membership, Turkey becomes less receptive to European suggestions concerning the treatment of its Kurdish minority.

On the other hand, the rationalist approach seems more appropriate to describe Turkish-U.S. relations. Until the fall of the Berlin wall, the Americans viewed Turkey's political stability and territorial integrity as indispensable to the interests of the United States in the Middle East. As the containment of the Soviet Union took precedence over any other considerations, the Kurdish unrest in eastern Anatolia, led by the Marxist-Leninist PKK, was instantly perceived as a direct threat to the integrity of allied Turkey. Human rights concerns were not really taken into account.

But even when the Clinton and Bush administrations brought human rights and democratic rule to the top of their agendas, Turkish-U.S. relations were still determined by the yardstick of important U.S. interests in the Middle East. Even though the growing criticism of Turkey's Kurdish policies by the U.S. Congress occasionally brought tension to the bilateral relationship in the 1990s and 2000s, the White House continued to value Turkey's role in supporting various U.S. policies. It comes as no surprise that the Turkish military operation in northern Iraq in February 2008 failed to cause a rift in U.S-Turkish relations, a development that was foreseen as certain by the majority of the international press throughout 2007.

## **B. KURDISTAN'S HISTORICAL BACKGROUND: KURDISH SOCIETY AND LOCAL RIVALRIES**

The historical background of the Kurds can be traced back to before the birth of Christ. Nader Entessar suggests that the Kurds are descendants of Indo-European tribes who settled in the Zagros Mountains during the sixth century B.C.<sup>11</sup> The area where Turkey, Iraq, and Iran meet, and where the Kurdish element is still the majority, was given the name Kurdistan in the early 13th century A.D. by the Arabs and the Iranians. The term "Kurdistan" indicated the administrative organization of the Kurds, based on chiefdoms and principalities.<sup>12</sup>

The Kurds are the fourth-largest ethnic group in the Middle East. Figures from 2004 suggest that there were, at the time, a total of 24 million Kurds in Kurdistan, 11.5 million in Turkey, 5 million in Iraq, and 6 million in Iran.<sup>13</sup> In Turkey, the majority of the Kurdish population speaks Kurmanji; however, a considerable number of Kurds speak Zaza, a local dialect, or Turkish. Additionally, Turkey's Kurds are further divided along religious lines, with about 70 percent believed to be Sunnis and the rest Alevis.<sup>14</sup>

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<sup>11</sup> Nader Entessar, *Kurdish Ethnonationalism* (Boulder: Lynne Rienner Publishers, Inc. 1992), 3.

<sup>12</sup> Beverly Milton-Edwards and Peter Hinchcliffe, *Conflicts in the Middle East since 1945*, 2<sup>nd</sup> ed. (New York: Routledge, 2004), 74.

<sup>13</sup> Colbert C. Held, "Peoples and Cultures of the Middle East," in *The Contemporary Middle East*, ed. Karl Yambert (Boulder: Westview Press, 2006), 23.

<sup>14</sup> Philip Robins, "Turkey and the Kurds: Missing Another Opportunity?," in *Turkey's Transformation and American Policy*, ed. Morton Abramowitz (New York: The Century Foundation Press, 2000), 63.

Factionalism, along with conflicting self-interests of the local tribal leaders and their political divisions have traditionally dictated political developments in Kurdistan, and have forged complex relations between its rulers and central authorities throughout the centuries.

### **1. Early Kurdish Nationalism**

The emergence of Kurdish nationalism may be attributed to the disintegration of the Ottoman Empire in the aftermath of World War I. Therefore, as Hakan Ozoglu argues, Kurdish nationalism was not a cause, but rather the result of the Empire's fall.<sup>15</sup> The Kurdish local rulers, usually great landowners and descendants of traditional notable families who traced their origins to the first Islamic dynasties, promoted a nationalistic agenda only when the Empire's collapse seemed inevitable. The Kurdish nationalist rhetoric was sometimes secessionist and sometimes autonomist, depending on the ideological background of Kurdish leaders.

At the end of World War I, Kurdish notables who were eager to promote an independent or even autonomous status for Kurdistan established the Society for the Advancement of Kurdistan (SAK) in December 1918. The divergence of ideological currents within the Kurdish nationalist camp was exemplified by the split of the SAK in 1920 into the autonomists (led by Sayyid Abdulkadir) and the secessionists (led by Emir Ali Bedirhan).

#### ***a. The Autonomists and the Semdinan Family***

The Semdinan family, headed by Sayyid Ubeydullah, took advantage of the power vacuum in Kurdistan after the completion of Sultan Mahmud's campaign against the Kurdish tribes, and managed to assert its control over a large part of Kurdistan. In 1880, Ubeydullah decided that he had to expand his area of control. Therefore, he triggered an uprising against the Qajars of Iran and the Ottomans. Feeling confident that he would defeat the Qajar forces, he invaded northwestern Iran in

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<sup>15</sup> Hakan Ozoglu, "Nationalism and Kurdish Notables in the Late Ottoman-Republican Era," *International Journal of Middle East Studies*, 33, no. 3 (2001): 383.

September 1880. However, his troops suffered a humiliating defeat at the hands of the Iranians. His rule ended when the Ottomans exiled him to the Hijaz.

The Ubeydullah revolt had been linked by some historians with the early Kurdish nationalist movement, because of Ubeydullah's plans to establish a self-governing Kurdish entity. The nationalist argument is dismissed by Ozoglu, on the grounds that Ubeydullah's militia force was composed of various ethnic groups with hardly any unified nationalist agenda.<sup>16</sup> Therefore, he suggests that the Ubeydullah revolt should be seen as the struggle of a Kurdish leader to establish his undisputed authority over most of Kurdistan, as opposed to a struggle driven by nationalist idealism.

Ubeydullah's son, Abdulkadir, assumed the presidency of the SAK and led the autonomist current of Kurdish nationalism. In the aftermath of the Young Turk revolution of 1908, Enver Pasa sought Abdulkadir's assistance in persuading the Kurdish tribes to pledge allegiance to the Committee of Union and Progress (CUP) regime. The CUP had been founded in 1889 by students in the military-medical academy as an underground organization that sought to resist the autocratic rule of Abdulhamid, and secure the territorial integrity of the Empire by promoting the ideals of Ottomanism.<sup>17</sup> Abdulkadir agreed to collaborate with the CUP regime and tried to convince the Kurdish local rulers to accept the new regime's authority. In parallel with his activity in the SAK, he became a high official in the Ottoman bureaucracy.

Abdulkadir seemed to favor only autonomy for his Kurdish state. According to a report of the acting high commissioner in Istanbul, "in private conversations [Abdulkadir claimed that] what Kurdistan needs is administrative separation under British auspices, and that, if this were assured, independence from Turkey would not be essential..."<sup>18</sup>

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<sup>16</sup> Hakan Ozoglu, "Nationalism and Kurdish Notables," 392.

<sup>17</sup> William L. Cleveland, *A History of the Modern Middle East* (Boulder: Westview Press, 2004), 135.

<sup>18</sup> Ibid.



*b. The Secessionists and the Bedirhani Family*

Abdulkadir's autonomist rhetoric infuriated the secessionist group of the Bedirhani family. Emin Ali Bedirhan, vice-president of the SAK, expelled Abdulkadir from the society. Abdulkadir responded by calling elections. He was reelected as president of the SAK, leaving Bedirhan's camp no other alternative but to secede and found a counter-organization, the Society for the Kurdish Social Organization (SKSO).

The SKSO advocated the independence of Kurdistan. The only issue the two separate societies had in common was their dislike for the proponents of Kemalism, an ideology that favored the creation of a unitary Turkish state and the silencing of any nationalist aspirations. Bedirhan even dared to propose that his society collaborate with Greek forces against the Kemalist challenge. The British High Commissioner in Istanbul reported in 1921:

...he and his friends had come into touch with the Greek representative here, who had listened favorably to the suggestion of a Kurdish movement against the Kemalists, which, without any formal co-operation, would promote the interests of both Greece and Kurdish nationalists.<sup>19</sup>

**C. THE TREATY OF SÈVRES: THE LOST OPPORTUNITY FOR KURDISTAN**

In the aftermath of World War I, the Committee of Deliverance (CD), a Kurdish committee that aimed to promote the Kurdish nationalist agenda through contacts with the Western powers, nominated General Sherif Pasha, a leading figure of the Kurdish nationalist movement, as the representative of the Kurds at the Paris Peace Conference. The presence of General Sherif at the peace conference did not satisfy the participants, especially the British. Lord Curzon, head of the British delegation to Sèvres, was reported arguing that "after enquiries in Constantinople, Baghdad, and elsewhere, I have found it impossible to find any representative Kurd...No Kurd appears to represent anything more

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<sup>19</sup> Ozoglu, "Nationalism and Kurdish Notables," 401.

than his clan.”<sup>20</sup> The Treaty of Sèvres, signed in August 1920 by the Sultan, contained promising clauses for the independence of Kurdistan, specifically:

Article 62: A Commission sitting at Constantinople and composed of three members appointed by the British, French, and Italian Governments respectively shall draft within three months from the coming into force of the present Treaty a scheme of local autonomy for the predominantly

Kurdish areas lying east of the Euphrates, south of the southern boundary of Armenia as it may be hereafter determined, and north of the frontier of Turkey with Syria and Mesopotamia....<sup>21</sup>

Article 64: If within one year from the coming into force of the present Treaty the Kurdish peoples within the areas defined in Article 62 shall address themselves to the Council of the League of Nations in such a manner as to show that a majority of the population of these areas desires independence from Turkey, and if the Council then considers that these peoples are capable of such independence and recommends that it should be granted to them, Turkey hereby agrees to execute such a recommendation, and to renounce all rights and title over these areas....<sup>22</sup>

The Treaty of Sevres was vigorously resisted by Kemal’s nationalists, and thus was never ratified by the Turks. It was replaced in 1923 by the Treaty of Lausanne, which included no provisions for Kurdistan; in contrast, it ascribed minority status to groups within the Turkish borders only on a religious basis. Thus, Muslim Kurds could not possibly describe themselves as a minority group.

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<sup>20</sup> Jonathan C. Randal, *After Such Knowledge, What Forgiveness? My Encounters with Kurdistan* (Boulder: Westview Press, 1999), 118.

<sup>21</sup> W. G. Elphinston, “The Kurdish Question,” *Royal Institute of International Affairs* 22, no.1 (1946).

<sup>22</sup> Ibid.

## **II. THE TURKISH KURDISH QUESTION IN THE PERIOD BETWEEN THE 1920S AND THE EARLY 1980S**

### **A. INTRODUCTION**

Turkey's Kurds participated in the Turkish War of Independence in the early 1920s on the assumption that the Turkish Republic would be based on the equality of the Turks and Kurds, and that the new state would continue to be the guardian of Islamic values. In that regard, the Grand National Assembly (GNA) had adopted a protocol in late 1919 which recognized the "national and social rights of the Kurds."<sup>23</sup>

In February 1922, the GNA began to discuss the details of establishing an autonomous Kurdish entity. The draft plan provided for the election of a Kurdish National Assembly by universal suffrage. However, the GNA retained the power to approve the holder of the Kurdish governor's office, and to command the Kurdish National Guard. Although the official language of the autonomous province would be Turkish, the use of the Kurdish language was actually encouraged. According to article 16 of the draft law, the Kurdish National Assembly was supposed to focus primarily on the foundation of a university with law and medical departments. The draft plan concerning Kurdish autonomy was approved by the GNA, but was never put in force.<sup>24</sup>

At the beginning of 1923, leading figures of the political establishment had still no difficulty in talking about the Kurdish people as a group with a different identity. However, there was a clear change of attitude. During the meetings for the drafting of the Lausanne Treaty, the Turkish representative, Ismet Inonu, argued that the Kurds had Turkish origins, and that there was no difference between the two groups in terms of customs and manners. In Izmit in January 1923, Kemal Ataturk himself stated that, instead of a separate Kurdish entity, he would support the establishment of local

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<sup>23</sup> Kevin McKiernan, *The Kurds: A People in Search of Their Homeland*, (New York: St. Martin's Press, 2006), 91.

<sup>24</sup> McDowall, *A Modern History of the Kurds*, 189.

autonomies in the regions where the Kurdish population was the majority because “it cannot be correct to try to draw another border [between Kurds and Turks]....”<sup>25</sup>

By the spring of 1923, the Kemalists’ policies vis-à-vis the Kurdish question had profoundly changed. Kemal declared that “the state which we have just created is a Turkish state.”<sup>26</sup> He intended to modernize the social structures and build a secular state along European lines. He was also determined to pursue the liberalization of the society from its Islamic heritage, and in doing so, viewed the revolution in the 1920s as “the embodiment of the enlightenment progress,” and the Turks as the “cultural carriers” of this progress and modernity.<sup>27</sup> In that context, Islam had to be removed from the public domain. The caliphate was officially abolished on March 4, 1924. All Kurdish organizations, publications, and the Kurdish language were outlawed.

This chapter demonstrates that Turkish effort to eradicate Kurdish nationalism was not challenged by the West. The United States and Europe were too preoccupied with the Soviet threat during the Cold War years to criticize Turkey’s Kurdish policy. Furthermore, the international human rights regime was too weak to influence U.S. and European policies vis-à-vis the fate of Turkey’s Kurds; however, that would change dramatically in the 1990s.

## **B. TURKISH DOMESTIC POLITICS: THE NON-RECOGNITION OF MINORITY STATUS TO THE KURDS**

In the mid-1920s, Ankara had examined the possibility of deporting its Kurdish community to neighboring countries. Indeed, when Henry Dobbs, the British High Commissioner in Baghdad, visited Ankara in late 1926, the Turkish Foreign Minister told him that his government had reached the conclusion that the Kurds could never be integrated into the Turkish society. The minister said that the Turks had succeeded in driving the Greeks and Armenians out of their holy land and “her next move would be to get rid of the Kurds...Turkey will never take them back.”<sup>28</sup>

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<sup>25</sup> McDowall, *A Modern History of the Kurds*, 190.

<sup>26</sup> McKiernan. *The Kurds*, 91.

<sup>27</sup> Christopher Houston, *Islam, Kurds and the Turkish Nation State* (Oxford: Berg Press, 2001).

<sup>28</sup> Randal, *After Such Knowledge, What Forgiveness?*, 289.

In 1934, the GNA enacted the Settlement Law (Law No. 2510), which assigned to Kurdistan the status of area closed to civilian settlement. The specific law determined that areas where the local language was not Turkish were to be evacuated, and their inhabitants moved to Turkish-speaking regions for assimilation into Turkey's culture. The principal aim of the law was to disperse Turkey's Kurds throughout western Anatolia in such a way that they would not make up more than 5 percent of the local population in any place.<sup>29</sup> It was believed that such a policy would lead to full Kurdish assimilation. Although the plan to eradicate Kurdish identity was ambitious, it was never implemented, for the state would have had to spend a tremendous amount of resources in order to uproot millions of Kurds and settle them in the western provinces.

Under the Law of Maintenance of Order of 1938, the Turkish authorities gave Turkish names to thousands of Kurdish villages, and the word "Kurdistan" was taken out of history books. From then on, the Kurds were referred to as "Mountain Turks."<sup>30</sup> In an attempt to create full assimilation, Kurdish families were obliged to give Turkish names to their children.

Meanwhile, the state sponsored scientific research which proved beyond any doubt the blood bond between Kurds and Turks. One author of such studies argued that

the one and only ideal that motivated me to write this book was [the desire to liberate] these common Turkish and Turkoman tribespeople ...who in reality are of Turkish blood and pure Turkish stock-[from] the suffering of speaking these half-baked [Kurdish] languages.<sup>31</sup>

## **1. The First Kurdish Revolts**

In the mid-1920s, due to the severe restrictions on Kurdish cultural heritage and religious traditions, the first Kurdish rebellion occurred, led by Shaykh Said of Piran. Said was prompted to revolt by the activism of a secret organization, the Kurdish Independence Society (*Azadi*), which was founded in 1924. The Turkish authorities were

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<sup>29</sup> McDowall, *A Modern History of the Kurds*, 207.

<sup>30</sup> McKiernan, *The Kurds*, 93.

<sup>31</sup> Resat Kasaba, "Kurds in Turkey: A Nationalist Movement in the Making," in *Ethnopolitical Warfare: Causes, Consequences, and Possible Solutions*, ed. Daniel Chirot and Martin E. P. Seligman (Washington, DC: American Psychological Association, 2001), 164.

aware of the underground activities of the organization, and had systematically pursued its dissolution by the paradigmatic punishment of its members. According to Robert Olson, *Azadi* had three main objectives: “to deliver the Kurds from Turkish oppression; to give Kurds freedom and opportunity to develop their country; and to obtain British assistance, realizing Kurdistan could not stand alone.”<sup>32</sup>

In an effort to attract the support of various Kurdish tribes, Said declared his vision for the restoration of the caliphate and the independence of the Kurds. The Turkish authorities responded vigorously and crushed the unrest by hanging the leader and about 50 of his followers in the town of Diyarbakir. Hundreds of Kurdish villages that were suspected of supporting the rebellion were destroyed.<sup>33</sup> Although the Turkish government had imposed martial law in the Kurdish region and no reporters were allowed to visit the area, British diplomats in Anatolia were receiving information about “Kurds being hanged wholesale, massacred, and practically crushed beyond recovery.”<sup>34</sup>

Another significant Kurdish revolt was the one organized by Ihsan Nuri Pasha, a former Ottoman officer. The revolt broke out in northern Turkish Kurdistan in the summer of 1928; it received support from Kurdish intellectuals who had formed a new pro-independence organization, the *Khoyboun* (Independence).<sup>35</sup> The aim of *Khoyboun* was to organize the dispersed Kurdish forces and support Nuri’s movement. The leadership of the organization believed that, taking into consideration the ill-conceived revolt of 1925-1927, a new Kurdish campaign should be carefully organized and executed by a well-trained, non-tribal, armed group. *Khoyboun*’s founders sought to form a revolutionary government and an army that would be deployed in mountainous Kurdistan, and to attract support from all tribesmen. The Kurdish organization received some funds from the Odessa-based International Minority Movement, and was also promised support by the Armenian Dashnak Party. France and Britain declined to provide

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<sup>32</sup> Robert Olson, *The Emergence of Kurdish Nationalism and the Sheikh Said Rebellion* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1991), 45.

<sup>33</sup> According to British Foreign Office report 371/14579, entire villages were leveled, women and children were murdered, and the livestock of Kurdish families was confiscated and sold.

<sup>34</sup> McDowall, *A Modern History of the Kurds*, 200.

<sup>35</sup> Entessar, *Kurdish Ethnonationalism*, 85.

any sort of assistance; however, Nuri was supported by Iran's Reza Shah, who allowed the Kurdish rebels to retreat into Iran in order to rearm and stage attacks against the Turkish authorities from a "safe haven."

By the autumn of 1929, Nuri's rebellion had gathered momentum and controlled a vast area, including Bitlis, Van, Ararat, and Botan. In 1930, the Iranian government reached a preliminary agreement with Turkey concerning territorial disputes between the two countries. In exchange, Iran agreed to cut off its support to Nuri's forces. During the summer of 1930, the Turkish army defeated the rebels and reasserted its control over Turkish Kurdistan.

In 1937-1938, the Dersim region became the epicenter of a new Kurdish revolt. Dersim always attracted the government's attention, because its Kurdish tribes were notorious for their tendency to disregard state authority. The Turkish government sent approximately 25,000 troops to confront 1,500 Kurdish guerillas. The leader of the rebels, Sayyid Riza, an Alevi cleric, in his letter to the British Foreign Secretary Sir Anthony Eden, described the plight of the Kurdish minority and pleaded for international intervention. The Turkish army defeated the Kurdish rebels. During the conflict, about 40,000 Kurds lost their lives, thousands were deported, and a special army corps was permanently stationed in Dersim.

## **2. The Post-World War II Environment-Political Pluralism and Military Interventions**

The one-party system, under which Kemal's Republican People's Party (RPP) was the sole political organization since the early days of Turkish independence, collapsed after World War II. In 1946, the Democratic Party (DP) launched its political platform by promising to fight against obsolete policies which suppressed the citizens' human rights and their civic-religious-economic liberties. Indeed, after its sweeping victory in 1950, the DP re-introduced religious instruction in public schools, financed the construction of thousands of mosques throughout the country, and permitted the muezzins to recite the call to prayer in Arabic. Islam was once again welcomed in the public domain, a development that Kurdistan longed for.

The next strategic move of the DP was the co-optation of the Kurdish agha class, which had been vigorously persecuted by the Kemalists. Arguing in favor of private property and the advantages of large estates in terms of productivity, the DP leadership safeguarded the rights of the aghas-landlords who were in a position to control the vast majority of the peasants' votes. According to David McDowall, the aghas had gradually and noiselessly forgotten the fundamentals of the Kurdish agenda, and had used their control over the peasants not as a way to further Kurdistan's ethnic interests, but rather to integrate themselves and their sons into the Turkish state elite.<sup>36</sup> The alliance between the aghas and the state was so successful that a British diplomat traveling in Kurdistan in 1956 admitted that "I did not catch the faintest breath of Kurdish nationalism which the most casual observer in Iraq cannot fail to notice."<sup>37</sup>

The coup d' état of May 1960 brought no major changes to the unitary policies of the Turkish state. The National Unity Committee (NUC) enacted a law in early 1961 that authorized the founding of regional boarding schools as vehicles of forced assimilation for Kurdish students. President Gursel, the leading figure of the coup, stated that "no nation exists with a personality of its own, calling itself Kurdish," and insisted that Kurds and Turks were racial brothers.<sup>38</sup> However, Kurdish separatism and the rising activism by leftist groups did not prevent the generals from introducing a progressive constitution in May 1961 which provided for all basic civic freedoms.

The pluralism of the new constitution and the restoration of democracy after the 1960 coup coincided with the advent of an educated generation of Kurds who had not experienced the nationalist fervor of the '20s and '30s and had no recollection of the harsh state repression that still haunted their parents. University attendance brought more and more Kurds together and exposed them to new ideas about nation-building.

In 1965, the Kurdistan Democratic Party of Turkey (TKDP), the first underground Kurdish group in Turkey since the 1930s, was established. The group favored a federation within existing borders, but failed to attract the support of the Kurdish

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<sup>36</sup> McDowall, *A Modern History of the Kurds*, 400.

<sup>37</sup> Foreign Office Report 371/130176, A.D. Parsons, *Report of a Tour of South East Turkey*, 29 Sep-19 Oct 1956.

<sup>38</sup> McDowall, *A Modern History of the Kurds*, 404.



population. Kurdish youth seemed more inclined to subscribe to the leftist ideology of the Turkish Workers' Party (TWP). Leftist student organizations and societies proliferated and attracted a considerable number of educated Kurds.

The Turkish Left criticized most of the state's policies; however, it was almost indifferent to the Kurdish question. The Left's silence forced a group of Kurdish intellectuals to establish their own organization, the Revolutionary Eastern Cultural Hearths (DDKO) in the late 1960s. In October 1970, the group's founders were arrested and charged with separatism. It was clear that political liberalism could not match with Kurdish nationalism in Turkey.<sup>39</sup>

In the early 1970s, Turkish leftist groups started resorting to bank robberies and kidnappings in order to support their activities, embarrassing the credibility of state security agencies. The radical Left was making preparations to establish camps in the mountains and then launch its revolutionary campaign. Turkey was further destabilized by large-scale workers' strikes. Political extremism challenged not only the country's internal security, but also its role as a credible NATO member and U.S. ally. In that context, the second coup of March 1971 sought to eradicate all sources of radicalism and introduce a new constitution that would ensure the state's control of political activism. Martial law was declared, freezing most of the manifestations of a vibrant civil society.

In October 1973, the military regime allowed a return to civilian control, and in early 1974, Prime Minister Bulent Ecevit declared a general amnesty. Kurds who had received prison sentences or left the country resumed their political activism. However, they now believed that they should form their own political groups, legitimate or underground, because the Turkish Left could no longer be trusted. It was in this volatile environment that Abdullah Ocalan, the future leader of the PKK, came to the fore. Ocalan, a student in the political science department at Ankara University, was arrested in 1972 during a demonstration in Ankara and received a seven-month prison sentence. He later admitted that "prison was a school on advancing the political struggle."<sup>40</sup> In

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<sup>39</sup> Aliza Marcus, *Blood and Belief: The PKK and the Kurdish Fight for Independence* (New York: New York University Press, 2007), 19-21.

<sup>40</sup> Marcus, *Blood and Belief*, 25.

1975, at a secret meeting in the Dikmen suburb of Ankara, Ocalan and about fifteen of his followers decided to form a Marxist-Leninist group that would fight for an independent Kurdistan.<sup>41</sup>

### **3. The First Steps of the PKK**

Ocalan saw the collapse of the Barzani nationalist movement in northern Iraq in March 1975 as proof to his belief that a nationalist organization had to be independent of all major powers, including the United States and the Soviet Union. The Barzani failure was also a sign that the tribal organization of Kurdish society and the dominant position of the large landowners over the peasants and their votes were serious obstacles to the Kurdish liberation movement.

Ocalan argued that the Kurdish revolt should start immediately and that the Kurdish agenda could be promoted only through armed struggle. Rival groups that advocated a democratic solution or even a limited resort to violence were seen as obstacles to the one-party rule that he believed was imperative. Ocalan's party favored a course of action that targeted the rightist groups that subscribed to the ideas of Turkish nationalism, the leftist groups that disregarded Kurdish interests, and the Kurdish groups that rejected Ocalan's radical thinking.<sup>42</sup>

The PKK was officially formed on November 28, 1978, during a secret meeting of its leading members at Fis village outside Diyarbakir. However, there was no time for PKK to initiate its campaign. After the arrest of a key PKK member by the Turkish authorities and an increased military presence in the southeast, Ocalan was forced to abandon Turkey in early 1979 and settle in Syria.

While in Syria, Ocalan established training arrangements with many Palestinian organizations, including Fatah, the Popular Front for the Liberation of Palestine, the Palestinian Popular Struggle Front, and also the Lebanese Communist Party. Meanwhile, Israel's military intervention in Lebanon in the summer of 1982 had led to the deterioration of the security status in Bekaa. Realizing that the border region between

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<sup>41</sup> Marcus, *Blood and Belief*, 29.

<sup>42</sup> Ibid., 40.

Turkey and Syria was inappropriate for staging attacks against Turkish targets, Ocalan, sometime in 1982, reached a deal with Massoud Barzani that permitted the PKK to use the Turkish-Iraqi border region. The agreement also allocated land to Ocalan's guerillas to build their camps.<sup>43</sup>

In Turkey, the widespread political violence in the country, perpetuated by clashes between leftist and rightist groups, provoked a third military intervention in September 1980. A year earlier, Bulent Ulusu, commander-in-chief of the Turkish fleet and a leading figure of the 1980 coup, had told a journalist that the presence of the Turkish army in the southeast was seen with increasing resentment by the local population. He argued that "the East is boiling; the communists and the Kurds are in complete cooperation there."<sup>44</sup>

The generals revised Turkey's constitution in a way that increased the power of the executive and curtailed civic rights. Its article 14, which banned political activism based on class, sect, language, or race, was indicative of the new political orientation of the Turkish regime.<sup>45</sup> "We have to sacrifice some personal rights for the security of the community," General Kenan Evren, leader of the coup, wrote in his memoirs.<sup>46</sup> The pre-coup political parties were dissolved, while the new ones were forbidden to establish youth or women's unions or open offices in the rural areas. University students, professors and civil servants could no longer formally join political parties. The military regime was aiming to depoliticize the youth and the educated classes, hoping to eradicate the sources that had generated political extremism during the 70s.<sup>47</sup>

The military regime did not only rely on legal reforms to curb Kurdish extremism. According to Ertugrul Kurkcu, in late 1983 and before the transition to democratic rule, the leaders of the coup made an effort to transform the Kemalist ideology by incorporating Islamic elements within it. The idea was that, if the state ceased

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<sup>43</sup> Marcus, *Blood and Belief*, 69.

<sup>44</sup> Henri J. Barkey and Graham E. Fuller, *Turkey's Kurdish Question* (Lanham, Md.: Rowman & Littlefield Publishers, 1998), 16.

<sup>45</sup> McDowall, *A Modern History of the Kurds*, 414.

<sup>46</sup> Nicole Pope and Hugh Pope, *Turkey Unveiled: A History of Modern Turkey* (Woodstock, N.Y. Overlook Press, 1998), 148.

<sup>47</sup> Marcus, *Blood and Belief*, 84.

demonizing the role of religion in the public domain and, instead, promoted the traditional Islamic character of the society, then it could co-opt the conservative leaders of the Kurdish community, and discredit the Marxist-atheist militants of the various Kurdish organizations. Advancing the Islamic values of the conservative Turkish society seemed a fair price to pay, in exchange for national cohesion and the marginalization of extremist elements.<sup>48</sup>

## **C. U.S. POLICY AND TURKEY: THE IMPERATIVES OF THE COLD WAR**

### **1. Early U.S.-Turkish Relations and the Kurds**

The beginning of formal diplomatic relations between the Turkish Republic and the United States can be traced to the period following the end of the Turkish War of Independence. Joseph C. Grew, American Minister to Switzerland, signed a Turkish-American treaty in Lausanne on August 6, 1923 that provided for official diplomatic relations between the two countries. The rejection of the Lausanne Treaty by the United States on January 18, 1927, due to the strong influence of Armenian interest groups on Congress and outstanding political differences between the Republican and Democratic parties, displeased Turkey. The Department of State sought to overcome the diplomatic tension through an exchange of notes between the American High Commissioner in Turkey and the Turkish Foreign Minister. The two sides agreed to proceed with the exchange of diplomatic missions, and to hold regular talks on bilateral problems in the future, regardless of a future ratification of the Lausanne Treaty by the Senate.

The establishment of formal diplomatic relations in 1927 provided the legal framework for the activities of American business interests in Turkey; however, from Turkey's point of view, the stance of the United States government and the American businessmen toward Turkish nationalism was the most important element of the bilateral relations. Between 1927 and 1939, the State Department insisted that its diplomats in Ankara refrain from criticizing policies that were dictated by Turkish nationalism.<sup>49</sup> In

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<sup>48</sup> Ertugrul Kurcu, "The Crisis of the Turkish State," *Middle East Report* 199 (1996): 5.

<sup>49</sup> Roger R. Trask, "The United States and Turkish Nationalism: Investments and Technical Aid during the Ataturk Era," *The Business History Review* 38, no.1 (1964): 59-60.

that context, the Kurdish uprisings of the '20s and '30s and their harsh suppression by state authorities were hardly an issue of concern for the State Department.

In the aftermath of World War II, the United States considered the Kurdish nationalist rhetoric in Turkey and its neighboring states as a potential tool in the hands of the Soviets that could destabilize the Middle East. Reviewing the trends of Soviet foreign policy in October 1945, the U.S. Ambassador in Moscow argued that the Kurdish community in Turkey was quite strong and it could become a threat to Turkey's territorial integrity if an external actor decided to arm and organize it. However, the Ambassador admitted that, so far, there were no indications or intelligence pointing to Soviet interference in Turkey's internal affairs in the southeast. Additionally, he described the Kurdish tribes as "individualistic feuding nomads," whose manipulation by the Soviets was not an easy task. The Ambassador speculated that the systematic policy of deportations and resettlement of Turkey's Kurds away from its eastern borders made it more difficult for the Soviets to establish contact with the Kurds and mobilize them.<sup>50</sup>

However, the Soviets had already engineered the mobilization of the Iranian Kurdish community. In April 1946, when the secessionist Kurdish movement in northern Iran was still powerful, Acheson, the Acting Secretary of State, informed the U.S. Consul at Tabriz, Iran, that the State Department disapproved of the prospect of him visiting the Kurdish leaders in Iranian Kurdistan. Acheson argued that such meeting could be interpreted by Turkey and Iraq as tacit U.S. support of a future independent Kurdistan, which was not a desirable development in the northern Middle East.<sup>51</sup>

During informal discussions between American and British diplomats in the U.S. Embassy in London on September 21, 1950 concerning the Kurdish role in the Middle East, the U.K. representatives stated that they were not particularly worried about Kurdish activism. The British argued that the Kurds had never been united, their revolts had traditionally been ill-organized, and that current Kurdish unrest was hardly a potential challenge to Western interests in the Middle East. The U.S. delegates informed the British side that the State Department was already establishing new consulates

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<sup>50</sup> Lokman I. Meho, *The Kurdish Question in U.S. Foreign Policy: A Documentary Sourcebook* (Westport: Praeger Publishers, 2004), 414-421.

<sup>51</sup> Ibid., 420.

throughout the Middle East. The Americans admitted that they were eager to establish closer contacts with the Kurds through the new diplomatic missions near the Kurdish regions. During the London meeting, both sides agreed that all dealings with the Kurds should be sought through the official governments of their host countries. Additionally, it was agreed that support to the Kurds should be restricted, because unlimited Kurdish build up could be a source of further unrest.<sup>52</sup>

Later that year, a policy statement which was prepared in the State Department addressed all sides of the Kurdish question in the northern Middle East and sought to propose policy options for the United States. The statement pointed out that the Kurdish tribes of Iraq, Iran, Syria, and Turkey were divided and ill-organized, and local state authorities had the resources to put down any uprising of domestic origin and direction. However, the State Department estimated that, if a small, well-equipped force of Soviet “Kurds” crossed the borders into Iraq, Iran, and Syria, it could lead to a massive Kurdish insurrection, possibly uncontrollable by the local security forces.<sup>53</sup> The authors of the statement also argued that Britain and the United States should jointly try to ease the tensions in Iraqi Kurdistan by providing technical assistance. The assistance should be used to improve the administrative structures of northern Iraq and raise the standards of living for the Kurds. Surprisingly, no such recommendations were made for the Kurdish communities in Turkey, Iran, or Syria.

Fear that the Soviet Union had the ability to manipulate the Kurdish communities in the northern Middle East was still apparent in the late 1950s. In 1959, the Shah of Iran complained to President Eisenhower that the Communists were using Radio Cairo broadcasts in order to mobilize the Kurds to revolt against their host-states and establish a free Kurdistan. The Shah mentioned that, when the Russians occupied Azerbaijan, they partitioned the region into Turkish and Kurdish provinces, and installed a Kurdish administration. The Iranian leader pointed out that Western self-restraint before Soviet aggression benefited only the Russians.

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<sup>52</sup> Meho, *The Kurdish Question in U.S. Foreign Policy*, 423.

<sup>53</sup> *Ibid.*, 430.

The U.S. State Department was well aware of the relation between Kurdish nationalism and Soviet foreign policy. Based on that fact and the build-up of tensions in the Kurdish regions of Iraq and Iran, the United States had adopted the position that

the United States considers the Kurdish problem in Iraq an internal matter which should be resolved internally...does not support Kurdish activities against the Government of Iraq...we believe the future well-being of Kurds in Iraq, as well as those in Iran and Turkey is inseparably tied to the well-being of the countries in which they reside.<sup>54</sup>

In a memorandum from the Joint Chiefs of Staff to Secretary of Defense McNamara in August 1963, U.S. officials clearly expressed their opinion about what U.S. policy should be toward the Kurds. It was proposed that the United States should continue to favor assimilation of the Kurds within existing boundaries and granting of some kind of local self-administration in predominately Kurdish provinces.<sup>55</sup>

## **2. The U.S.-Turkish Relations and the Soviet Factor**

The aggressive policies of the Soviet Union in seeking Russian-Turkish co-administration of the Turkish straits in the aftermath of World War II, and Stalin's support for Georgian and Armenian claims on Turkish lands, fostered a strategic relationship between Turkey and the United States.<sup>56</sup> In Khrushchev's words, it was Stalin's policies that "succeeded in frightening the Turks right into the open arms of the Americans."<sup>57</sup> Indeed, in the late 1940s, the Truman administration reached the conclusion that it was imperative to keep Turkey out of the Soviet Union's sphere of influence. Subsequently, this decision led to the mapping out of a whole new U.S. strategy not only toward Turkey, but toward Iran and Greece as well. The new U.S. policy of containing Soviet expansion in the eastern Mediterranean and the Middle East was formulated in February 1947, when the British government suddenly informed the

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<sup>54</sup> Meho, *The Kurdish Question in U.S. Foreign Policy*, 443.

Meho, *The Kurdish Question in U.S. Foreign Policy*, 452.

<sup>56</sup> Bruce R. Kuniholm, "Turkey and the West Since World War II," in *Turkey between East and West: New Challenges for a Rising Regional Power*, ed. Vojtech Mastny and R. Craig Nation (Boulder: Westview Press, 1996), 45.

<sup>57</sup> Strobe Talbot, *Khrushchev Remembers: The Last Testament* (New York: Little Brown Press, 1974), 295-296.

United States that it had decided to pull its forces out of Greece and Turkey within a month. The Truman Doctrine, which was operationalized through the Marshall Plan, was made public in March 1947, and aimed to secure the Western orientation of both Turkey and Greece.

Turkey's decision to participate in the Korean War in the early 1950s signaled the Turkish desire to join the newly established North-Atlantic Alliance and receive security guarantees from the United States. In exchange, Turkey promoted its geo-strategic significance for the defense of Europe. According to the first contingency plans in the event of a Soviet attack southwards, the Turkish army was expected to delay the Soviet advances in Thrace, and then withdraw to Anatolia and further delay the Soviet campaign in the mountainous southeast.<sup>58</sup>

Within the United States, the strategic importance of Turkey was not equally appreciated by all. Admiral Forrest Sherman, Chief of Naval Operations, argued that Turkey and Greece were important countries for the defense of Western Europe, and therefore both states should be protected by the newly established security institutions of the West. On the other hand, Army Chief of Staff General Lawton Collins argued that Turkey was a Middle Eastern country, belonged to the British sphere of influence, and therefore the Commonwealth was responsible for its security.

It was General Dwight Eisenhower, Supreme Allied Commander of Europe, who would play the most decisive role in formulating the framework for cooperation between Turkey and the United States. Eisenhower argued that there were mutual benefits in the Turkish-American relationship, and that Turkey deserved security guarantees from the U.S. in order to secure its cooperation on international diplomacy issues. In February 1952, Greece and Turkey were formally admitted to NATO.<sup>59</sup>

In 1955, Turkey, alongside Iran, Pakistan, and Britain, joined the Baghdad Pact (Iraq signed the pact but never really participated in the alliance), a military alliance that was supposed to coordinate the efforts of its member states against Soviet expansion. Meanwhile, high-altitude U-2s and strike aircraft equipped with tactical nuclear weapons

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<sup>58</sup> Kuniholm, "Turkey and the West Since World War II," 46-47.

<sup>59</sup> Ibid., 50.



were stationed at Incirlik airbase in 1956 and 1957, respectively, while intelligence-gathering platforms were installed along the Turkish Black Sea coast. The geo-strategic location of Turkey was indeed indispensable to the in-depth surveillance of Soviet moves.

The Eisenhower administration believed that assisting Turkey with building its own reliable armed forces was a more cost-effective strategy than allocating additional U.S. forces for its defense. It was argued that economic assistance to Turkey was the most effective way to secure U.S. interests in the Middle East.<sup>60</sup> In any case, the accession of Turkey to NATO had provided the necessary security guarantees for the country. For example, Khrushchev stated in October 1957 that if there was a war, Turkey would hardly last a day. The U.S. State Department answered back that “if aggression took place against Turkey, the United States would fulfill its obligations within NATO and aid Turkey with all its power.”<sup>61</sup>

However, after the Cuban missile crisis and the beginning of détente in the mid-1960s, the United States estimated that the northern Middle East region was no longer under immediate danger of a Soviet offensive. Secretary of Defense McNamara stated before a Congressional committee in 1965 that the countries of that region had to understand that the immediate danger to their security did not stem from the Soviet Union, but rather from the presence of powerful minorities within their borders, as well as existing social inequalities.<sup>62</sup>

Although the imperatives of the Cold War dictated a close cooperation between the United States and Turkey, the bilateral relationship was often frustrated by Turkish mistrust of U.S. intentions. Barry Rubin and Kemal Kirisci have argued that Turkish doubts regarding U.S. intentions vis-à-vis Turkey were fueled by three major developments that marked the bilateral relations. First, the removal of tactical nuclear weapons, the famous Jupiter missiles, from Turkey in 1962, in the aftermath of the Cuban missile crisis, without any prior consultations with the Turkish government brought about

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<sup>60</sup> Kuniholm, “Turkey and the West Since World War II,” p. 51.

<sup>61</sup> Marcy Agmon, “Defending the Upper Gulf: Turkey’s Forgotten Partnership,” *Journal of Contemporary History* 21 (1986): 84.

<sup>62</sup> *Ibid.*, 91.

serious tension in U.S.-Turkish relations. Second, in 1964, President Lyndon Johnson sent a letter to Prime Minister Ismet Inonu, one of the founders of the Turkish Republic, regarding the developments in Cyprus. President Johnson warned the Turkish government to abstain from using U.S. weapons in Cyprus, and made clear that, if Turkish military intervention in the island triggered a Soviet counter-response, Turkey should not count on U.S. support. The letter has been considered one of the most humiliating incidents in Turkish diplomatic history and struck a serious blow at the bilateral relations. Third, after the 1974 Turkish military intervention in Cyprus, the United States Congress imposed an arms embargo on Turkey that lasted for nearly three years.<sup>63</sup>

#### **D. EUROPEAN POLICY AND TURKEY: THE FIRST STEPS TOWARD EUROPEAN INTEGRATION**

According to Robert Olson, after the end of World War I, the European powers, especially the United Kingdom, examined the possibility of supporting the establishment of an independent Kurdistan. There were two main geopolitical reasons for this. The first was to create a buffer zone between the Turkish Republic and the Turkic-speaking peoples in the Caucasus region, particularly in Azerbaijan. The potential of Muslim unity was seen as a serious threat to European interests in the Middle East.

The second reason for supporting Kurdish independence was the prospect of restricting the state power of Turkey, Iraq, Iran, and Syria. A Kurdish state would constitute a buffer between Turks and Arabs, would command most of the water resources in the region, and would allow Britain or France to use the Kurdish state against the governments of the above-mentioned countries whenever they deemed it necessary to do so.<sup>64</sup>

However, the consolidation of power by Kemal's nationalists forced the British to rethink their Kurdish strategy. After 1921 and Faysal's accession to the throne of Iraq, the British realized that the Kurdish population of Mosul province in northern Iraq was

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<sup>63</sup> Barry Rubin and Kemal Kirisci, *Turkey in World Politics: An Emerging Multiregional Power* (Boulder: Lynne Rienner Publishers, 2001), 132.

<sup>64</sup> Robert Olson, "The Kurdish Question in the Aftermath of the Gulf War: Geopolitical and Geostrategic Changes in the Middle East," *Third World Quarterly* 13, no. 3 (1992): 479.

essential for effective control over the country. The British saw the Sunni Kurds as a necessary balance to the Shi'i Arabs of the south, who constituted the majority of the country's Arab population.

The new British policy was most evident in their negotiations with the Turks on the Mosul question. In a letter to the British principal negotiator on March 16, 1925, Sir Henry Dobbs argued that

the Kurds in the tracts which Turkey desires have been the short anchor of British influence in Iraq. It was only through the solid pro-British Kurdish "bloc" in the constituent assembly that the Anglo-Iraq Treaty was accepted in June 1924...a cession of loyal Kurdish tracts to Turkey would engender mistrust of us throughout Iraq, not only among the Kurds but among the Arabs.<sup>65</sup>

In that context, the United Kingdom sought to marginalize Iraqi Kurdish leaders such as Shaykhs Barzani, Mahmud, and Taha, who had supporters in Turkey and could stage destabilizing revolts in both countries. By 1932, only Shaykh Barzani's followers still constituted a considerable force in Iraqi Kurdistan, although his power was reduced after the devastating British air raids of 1931-1932.<sup>66</sup>

It is worth noting that the Kurdish revolts of the '20s and '30s were not covered in length in the European press, and when European newspapers reported the Kurdish revolts in southeast Turkey, they tended to highlight Turkey's point of view. For example, on July 16, 1937, *The Times of London* reported the Dersim events under the headline "Those Who Object to Education, A Revolt Suppressed by Troops." Basile Nikitine, a former Russian diplomat in Turkey, wrote a letter to the newspaper's editors and argued that "it is an error to suppose that the Kurds object to education; what they are resisting is turkification."<sup>67</sup>

After World War II, with the consolidation of democracy throughout Western Europe, Kurdish societies and clubs proliferated in many European capitals. The Center d'Etudes Kurdes of Paris was founded in 1949. The Kurdish Students Society in Europe

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<sup>65</sup> Olson, "The Kurdish Question in the Aftermath of the Gulf War," 482.

<sup>66</sup> Ibid., 483.

<sup>67</sup> Randal, *After Such Knowledge What Forgiveness?*, 261.

(KSSE) was founded in 1956 and soon established branches in many European cities. In 1969, the Society of Fighters for Kurdistan was established in Uppsala, Sweden. All societies organized meetings where the developments in the Kurdish regions were discussed; additionally, they financed the publication of pamphlets and journals in Kurdish and Arabic.<sup>68</sup>

Meanwhile, Turkey had already taken its first steps toward integration into Europe. In 1950, it became a member of the Council of Europe, and in 1963, the then-European Economic Community accepted Turkey as an associate member. The cooperation between the two sides was disrupted by the coup of 1980, when the European Community (E.C.) decided to freeze its formal relations with Ankara and suspend flows of economic aid. The reaction of the Council of Europe was even stronger; it expelled all Turkish representatives from its proceedings. Although the interruption of European aid funds did not cause serious problems to the country's economic program, it nevertheless had a "symbolic significance" and, according to William Hale, it provided additional incentives to the military regime to permit the transition to democracy in 1983.<sup>69</sup>

## **E. CONCLUSION**

Since its inception, Kemalism sought the top-down transformation of Turkey into a modern state of European standards. The establishment of a strong unitary state could not afford either the recognition of the society's multiethnic character, or the attachment to Islamic values and institutions which were considered obsolete or a threat to the project of modernization. The formulation of the Kemalists' decision to deny the "otherness" of the Kurds was gradual, since, in the early '20s, they vacillated between autonomy and other forms of limited self-administration for the Kurds. But when the decision was made to subdue Kurdish nationalism, the state remained focused on that central principle of Kemalism irrespective of the parties that led the governing coalitions or the disruption of democratic rule by the military. Moreover, after the 1980 coup, the

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<sup>68</sup> C. J. Edmonds, "Kurdish Nationalism," *Journal of Contemporary History* 6, no. 1 (1971): 105-106.

<sup>69</sup> William Hale, *Turkish Foreign Policy* (Portland: Frank Cass Press, 2000), 177.

army proclaimed itself the guardian of Kemal's legacy, and rebuilt the governing structures in such way that it could indefinitely influence central political decisions of the civilian leadership.

Furthermore, Kemalism was based on the principles of constitutionalism and popular sovereignty; however, the idiosyncratic project of the top-down transformation of a multi-ethnic society into a homogeneous entity of "Turkish citizens," which would forget about old traditions and diverse ethnic backgrounds, distanced Turkish society from the liberal models of the West. Heinz Kramer has criticized the authoritarianism of Kemal's regime, arguing that "liberalism and democracy were not part of the Kemalist principles."<sup>70</sup>

Said's revolt was a turning point for Kurdish-Turkish relations. Turkey, realizing the potential threat of further territorial dismemberment, intensified the policies of forced assimilation of its Kurdish minority. But the three major revolts of the '20s and '30s demonstrated deep divisions within the Kurdish nationalist movement. Long-lasting political differences, alliances with or opposition to the state, and base local interests of the Kurdish tribes, all contributed to the fragmentation of Turkey's Kurdish community at critical moments in its history. The lack of active support by major external actors – Iranian support in the '30s was more passive than active, while Soviet rhetoric regarding the rights of the Kurds was never operationalized – obliged the Kurds to organize their revolts with few means at their disposal. The advanced Turkish army had no difficulty in crushing the Kurdish rebellions. The ferocity of the state's response to the militants was so intense that the Kurds remained virtually silent – and ignored – until the '70s.

The geo-strategic significance of Turkey, labeled as a frontline state throughout the Cold War years, shaped the West's Turkish policy. The United States and Europe were absorbed in their struggle against the Soviet threat; therefore, anything that could undermine the territorial integrity of Turkey was viewed as a threat to the West's core interests. Until the early '80s, neither the E.C. or the U.S. regarded Turkey's Kurds as a minority group whose linguistic and cultural rights were denied by a despotic regime.

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<sup>70</sup> Heinz Kramer, *A Changing Turkey: The Challenge to Europe and the United States* (Washington, DC: Brookings Institution Press, 2000), 7.

The Americans did not ignore the Kurdish community in Turkey because they had limited knowledge of the Kurdish history. In fact, the United States had established its presence in the Middle East before World War II, had monitored the ways in which the Russians had manipulated the Kurdish nationalists in Iran and Iraq, and had itself supported the Barzani movement in northern Iraq in the '70s. But no direct or indirect interference by the Americans in southeast Anatolia to mobilize the Kurds against the state was ever undertaken.

The Europeans followed America's lead regarding Turkey's Kurds. The E.C. left the Kurdish question out of the negotiating framework leading to Turkey's associate membership in the E.C. in the early '60s; the loose joining of Turkey to the emerging European establishment had hardly any effect on the E.C.'s economic and social policies. It is worth noting that the negotiations between the E.C. and Turkey in the '60s and '70s were often frustrated by Turkey's insistence on securing free flows of Turkish immigrants to the European labor markets, a request the Europeans rejected. The fate of the Kurds, and Turkey's human rights record, never came up as major issues of concern. The European human rights activism of the '90s was still far away.

### **III. THE TURKISH KURDISH QUESTION IN THE PERIOD BETWEEN THE MID-1980S AND THE EARLY 2000S**

#### **A. INTRODUCTION**

After the mid-1980s, Turkey was destined to fight against a powerful Kurdish insurgency that would seriously challenge state authority in the southeast, cause the death of thousands of Kurds and Turks, and force the state to curtail civic freedoms. On August 15, 1984, the PKK initiated its guerilla campaign by attacking Turkish military targets in the towns of Eruh and Semdinli. According to one of the participants, “our goal really wasn’t to kill a lot of soldiers. The attack was more to gain people’s support and get them to join us....”<sup>71</sup>

This chapter demonstrates that Turkey’s Kurdish policy in the ’80s and ’90s soon caused the country’s human rights record to be labeled as one of the world’s poorest. Although the West remained almost silent in the ’80s due to other priorities such as containing the Soviet threat, it gradually started to value the third parties’ human rights records and their policies vis-à-vis the protection of minority rights. The developments in southeast Anatolia embarrassed Turkey internationally by exposing its Kurdish policy to the scrutiny of non-governmental organizations, the U.S. Congress, and the European Parliament.

#### **B. TURKISH DOMESTIC POLITICS: THE PKK CHALLENGE**

##### **1. Turkish and Kurdish Atrocities**

One of Turkey’s first reactions to the PKK challenge was to establish a new militia force composed of local armed villagers. The institution of temporary village guards was officially created in April 1985 through an amendment to the Village Law, which allocated the necessary funds for the recruiting of the guards. The first Kurdish

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<sup>71</sup> Marcus, *Blood and Belief*, 79.

tribes to offer manpower for the new institution were those affiliated with the Right and far Right political spectrum, or those that already opposed the PKK's tactics and goals.

By 1990, there were about 20,000 village guards, and by 1993, approximately 35,000. The motive to participate in the village guard system was basically economic. In 1992, village guards received approximately US\$230 each month, an income that was several-fold above the average per capita income in the area.<sup>72</sup> But the village guards were not just an additional threat to the PKK's campaign; they also provided some PKK guerillas with a new moral dilemma. "I didn't want to fight them, they were Kurds too," admitted a former PKK militant.<sup>73</sup>

Meanwhile, PKK's 3<sup>rd</sup> Congress of October 1986 adopted some radical measures, such as forced military conscription of the Kurdish youth. Those Kurds who refused to join the ranks of the organization would risk being kidnapped. Conscription aimed to demonstrate the authority of the PKK in the Kurdish region and also to increase the number of militants. Additionally, the congress concurred with Ocalan's proposal concerning the forced taxation of Kurdish merchants and other businessmen in the southeast.

When the PKK's campaign started gaining momentum in 1987, the government appointed a governor-general over eight Kurdish provinces in the southeast, and a state of emergency was declared. The governor-general was vested with extensive powers, including the evacuation of villages, although his primary duty was the effective co-ordination of the various state agencies fighting the insurgents.

In June 1988, Decree 285 further extended the governor-general's powers, which now included the deportation of Kurds at his own discretion. The rate of village evacuations intensified. By 1994, more than 800 Kurdish settlements had been destroyed or evacuated, mainly those close to the Iraqi-Turkish borders, while over 750,000 Kurds were considered homeless. In his written answer to legislators' questions, the Minister of the Interior admitted in April 1994 that 288 villages and 366 hamlets had been totally

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<sup>72</sup> McDowall, *A Modern History of the Kurds*, 422.

<sup>73</sup> Marcus, *Blood and Belief*, 98.



evacuated, while 178 villages and 39 hamlets were partially abandoned.<sup>74</sup> However, the destruction of settlements was continuously denied by the Turkish authorities. In 1995, Prime Minister Ciller insisted that the PKK militants, dressed in military uniforms, were responsible for the burning of villages.

The resentment caused by the implementation of the PKK's "laws" concerning conscription and taxation forced many Kurds to join the village guards militia force in order to protect their families and their property. On the other hand, the PKK pushed even further to undermine the state's authority in the southeast, preventing Ankara from exercising its control over the disputed area. Specifically, it warned contractors and their teams who were undertaking public works projects in the area to abandon the area. Their technical equipment was set fire. The Kurds were prohibited from joining Turkish political parties. Reading Turkish newspapers or watching television was banned. TV antennas were removed "so that justice is not merely done; it is seen to be done."<sup>75</sup>

In late 1990, the PKK decided to stop targeting civilians in order to expose the magnitude of Turkey's oppression of its Kurdish minority and the state's lack of respect for universally-recognized human rights. Ocalan announced an amnesty for those village guards who would abandon the institution. The state responded by widening the authority of the governor-general to include the closure of any publishing house, anywhere in Turkey.

## **2. President Ozal's Kurdish Policy in the 1990s**

On the political level, the Turkish establishment started to show some signs of willingness to confront the sources of Kurdish unrest in the early 1990s. In July 1990, the Social Democrat Populist Party (SHP) publicized the findings of an inquiry concerning the situation in the southeast region, and urged the government to display initiative and implement radical reforms, including freedom of expression, abolition of the institutions

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<sup>74</sup> "Forced Evictions and Destruction of Villages in Turkish Kurdistan," *Middle East Report* 199 (1996): 8.

<sup>75</sup> Amikam Nachmani, *Turkey: Facing a New Millennium* (New York: Manchester University Press, 2003), 35.

of village guards and the governor-general, lifting of the state of emergency, and initiation of a major program of regional development.

Under this same spirit, in February 1991, President Ozal proposed a draft bill in the GNA which put an end to the penalization of the use of Kurdish in public, except in broadcasts, publications, and education. Protests by the Kemalists forced Ozal to withdraw his proposal. These protests were even joined by the SHP, which had made similar recommendations just a few months earlier, but now accused the government of betraying Kemal's legacy. Nevertheless, in April 1991, Ozal re-introduced this controversial bill into the GNA, and it was finally adopted after intense debates. Later that year, Ozal declared that "it must be made clear that those in the Iraqi Kurdish area are relatives of Turkish citizens. So the borders are to some extent artificial, dividing people into two sections."<sup>76</sup>

While Ankara's Assembly was discussing the innovative policies of the Turkish President, about half a million Kurdish refugees from northern Iraq had abandoned their homeland and crossed the borders into Turkey. Saddam's army had responded vigorously to the Kurdish uprising in March 1991, driving thousands of Iraqi Kurds toward the Turkish and Iranian borders.

Now Turkey found itself in the awkward position of implementing two contradictory policies. On the one hand, the new anti-terror law of 1991 provided the state with additional tools to keep its Kurdish minority in check. For instance, Article 8 of that law penalized any oral or written propaganda that targeted the unity of the state, without taking the intent of the author or speaker into consideration.<sup>77</sup>

On the other hand, the Turkish government proceeded to establish formal relations with Iraq's two main Kurdish parties, Barzani's Kurdistan Democratic Party (KDP) and Talabani's Patriotic Union of Kurdistan (PUK).<sup>78</sup> According to Ozal's analysis, formal relations between Turkey and the representatives of the Iraqi Kurds had the potential of demonstrating to his country's Kurds that the government was not

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<sup>76</sup> Michael M. Gunter, "A De Facto Kurdish State in Northern Iraq," *Third World Quarterly* 14, no. 2 (1993): 302.

<sup>77</sup> Marcus, *Blood and Belief*, 192.

<sup>78</sup> McDowall, *A Modern History of the Kurds*, 429.

opposed to Kurds per se, but only to the PKK's terrorism.<sup>79</sup> The cooperation between Ankara and Iraqi Kurds reached the point of forcing the Iraqi Kurdish Front to warn the PKK in early 1992 that "if it failed to cease activities against Turkey, it would be purged from the region."<sup>80</sup>

It was obvious that, so far, Ocalan's main objective was to plunge Turkey into a state of civil conflict and anarchy. Such conditions could reasonably provoke another military coup, which in turn would destabilize the democratic institutions and marginalize the country at the international level. An international mediation would then be possible, resulting in the enforcement of a Turkish Kurdish "safe haven."<sup>81</sup> But the close cooperation between Turkey and the Iraqi Kurdish leadership forced the PKK to reconsider the desired end state of its campaign. In late 1991, when journalist Ismet Imset asked Ocalan whether the prospect of a federal solution to the Kurdish question would be acceptable, the PKK leader replied, "Unquestionably this is what we see."<sup>82</sup>

In mid-1992, the unabated Kurdish insurgency forced Ozal to allow the military to take the lead in fighting the PKK's terrorism. Clashes between the PKK and Turkish armed forces intensified. The Turkish campaign was assisted by the Iraqi Kurds, who imposed considerable restrictions on the PKK's activism in northern Iraq. Ocalan responded by imposing a blockade in Iraqi Kurdistan, simply by threatening the lives of the truck drivers. Facing serious shortages of food and fuel as a result of the blockade, Talabani and Barzani had no difficulty in agreeing to assist the Turks in their massive offensive against PKK militants and their camps in northern Iraq in October and November 1992.

The Turkish offensive in Iraq disrupted the operational capabilities of the PKK. Indeed, the Turkish newspaper *Sabah* revealed in March 1993 that Talabani had met Ocalan in February, and the PKK leader had expressed his readiness to stop fighting the Turkish state. Moreover, on March 17, 1993, Ocalan himself announced a unilateral

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<sup>79</sup> Barkey and Fuller, *Turkey's Kurdish Question*, 53.

<sup>80</sup> Gunter, "A De Facto Kurdish State in Northern Iraq," 306.

<sup>81</sup> Nachmani, *Turkey: Facing a New Millennium*, 36.

<sup>82</sup> McDowall, *A Modern History of the Kurds*, 429.

ceasefire, effective from 21 March until 15 April, and stated that, if Turkey ceased its offensive against his men, “there is no reason why we should not extend our ceasefire...I personally would like to be able to return unarmed to the southeast in order to engage in political activity.”<sup>83</sup>

Although Ozal was initially skeptical about Ocalan’s ceasefire offer, he later thought that the PKK’s initiative presented a unique opportunity. He confessed to his friend Genciz Candal, a Turkish journalist, that he was thinking about offering a piecemeal amnesty: initially, militants who were not charged with particular crimes would be allowed to return to their families, then, after a period of two years, their commanders would be allowed to return, and finally, after a five year period, Ocalan himself. Ozal was not particularly worried about the generals rejecting his plans, because they understood that the war of attrition in the southeast could not go on forever. Ozal was sure that it would be the hardliners in the parliament who would resist his Kurdish policy. On April 15, he said to Candal again that “I am afraid these idiots [the government] will ruin everything...if we miss this chance the situation will get much worse.”<sup>84</sup> But on April 17, 1993, Ozal died.

The Turkish establishment understood Ocalan’s concessions to be a sign of military weakness and desperation. President Ozal’s successor, Demirel, and the General Staff signaled their rejection of Ocalan’s offer and their determination to eradicate all PKK’s cadres before any discussion on the state’s Kurdish policy could begin. Even though Demirel had stated in 1991 that he had finally realized the Kurdish reality in Turkey, he abrogated the reforms which were initiated by Ozal, and restricted the government’s contacts with the Iraqi Kurdish leadership. Demirel subscribed to the hardliners’ thinking that labelled reforms regarding the organization of the Kurdish community as unpatriotic.

The PKK decided to resume fighting in June 1993. Meanwhile, Labor Party (Halkin Emek Partisi-HEP), Turkey’s Kurdish party was banned by a court, though its leading officials proceeded immediately to form a new one, the Democratic Party

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<sup>83</sup> McDowall, *A Modern History of the Kurds*, 436-437.

<sup>84</sup> Randal, *After Such Knowledge, What Forgiveness?*, 279.

(Demokrasi Partisi-DEP). The PKK focused on destabilizing Turkey's tourist industry, a crucial source of revenue for the state, by staging bomb attacks against famous seaside resorts on the Aegean coast, and thus discouraging tourists from visiting the country.

On October 18, 1993, the PKK warned all Turkish and foreign reporters to abandon "Northern Kurdistan." In 1994, 300,000 troops massed in the southeast to fight against the PKK. The Turkish army's campaign resulted in the devastation of numerous villages. In June 1994, the DEP was closed down, although a new Kurdish party, the People's Democratic Party, or Halkin Demokrasi Partisi (HADEP), was formed. The Turkish offensive against the PKK continued unabated until Ocalan's arrest in Kenya in February 1999. Having neutralized Ocalan, the Turks thought that the war was finally won.

## **C. U.S. POLICY AND TURKEY: STRATEGIC PARTNERSHIP**

### **1. Mutual U.S.-Turkish Interests**

In the 1980s, the strategic partnership between the United States and Turkey was still conditioned by the Cold War imperatives, and the fact that Turkey was considered a frontline state ensured minimal criticism of Turkey's Kurdish policy. For example, during the U.S. State Department's daily briefing on June 15, 1988, the spokesman confirmed that the United States still viewed the Kurdish question through a Cold War lens by stating that

U.S. policy is that Kurds should satisfy their aspirations peacefully within the framework of the existing states. The United States does not interfere in the internal affairs of those countries.<sup>85</sup>

When Robert Strausz-Hupe, the U.S. Ambassador in Ankara in the '80s, was asked about the increasing incidents of human rights abuses against the Kurds, he said that he preferred to let the Europeans "carry the human rights ball."<sup>86</sup> Apparently, his job of keeping the Turks in line with the U.S. policies of Soviet containment was more important than wasting political capital in criticizing Turkey's Kurdish policy. However,

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<sup>85</sup> Meho, *The Kurdish Question in U.S. Foreign Policy*, 481.

<sup>86</sup> Randal, *After Such Knowledge, What Forgiveness?*, 274.

there were also officials in the administration with quite “progressive” ideas, such as Richard Schifter, Assistant Secretary of State for Human Rights and Humanitarian Affairs, who noted in 1988 that “we believe that although they [the Kurds] are not included in the Lausanne Treaty, they are a national minority by international standards.”<sup>87</sup>

In general, during the 1980s, U.S. officials avoided debates concerning Turkey’s Kurdish policy, choosing instead to emphasize improvements in the Turkish human rights regime, as recorded in the State Department’s Country Report on Human Rights Practices for the years 1986, 1987 and 1988. However, the tone changed in 1989, as the report for that year noted that a large number of human rights abuses had taken place in Turkey and that “continuing instances of torture was the principal human rights problem in 1989.”<sup>88</sup> The report criticized the inaction of the country’s legal system concerning allegations of torture, and the fact that basic civic freedoms were curtailed. The 1989 report also noted serious restrictions that continued to exist on freedom of expression, association and assembly, and the state’s intolerance regarding the cultural rights of the Kurds.

After the end of the Cold War, Turkey and the United States continued to have similar views on many strategic issues, including the accession of Eastern European countries to NATO, Turkey’s roadmap to the European Union, and the diversification of energy resources through the building of new oil pipelines that would transfer Caspian oil to the West by avoiding Russian or Iranian soil.<sup>89</sup> During the 1990s, the United States continued to view Turkey as a pivotal state regarding the more activist U.S. role in Middle Eastern affairs. The proximity of Turkey to the Middle East meant that the country was still important to many U.S. foreign policy concerns.

The close military cooperation between Turkey and Israel after 1996 also made Turkey’s role in Middle Eastern affairs seem more significant for Washington. During this same period, the end of the war in Bosnia presented an unexpected opportunity for

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<sup>87</sup> Michael M. Gunter, *The Kurds in Turkey: A Political Dilemma* (Boulder: Westview Press, 1990), 117.

<sup>88</sup> “Turkey: Human Rights Developments,” Human Rights Watch, <http://www.hrw.org/reports/1990/WR90/HELSINKI.BOU-04.htm> (accessed February 9, 2008).

<sup>89</sup> Rubin and Kirisci, *Turkey in World Politics*, 132.

Turkey. Indeed, the United States asked Turkey, as a Muslim NATO country, to undertake the challenging task of training the Bosnian Muslim army, because prolonged U.S. involvement in the western Balkans could be full of political risks. Nevertheless, the Clinton administration started stressing the importance of respect for human rights and democratic governance at a time when Kurdish unrest in southeast Turkey was forcing the Turkish authorities to curtail civic freedoms and commit atrocities. That was highly inconvenient for Turkey's profile internationally.

## **2. Congressional Criticism of Turkey's Kurdish Policy**

By the early/mid-1990s, Congressional criticism of Turkey's human rights record had substantially grown. On November 26, 1991, Lee H. Hamilton, Chairman of the Committee on Foreign Affairs, sent a letter to Secretary of State James Baker regarding the violations of the human rights of Turkey's Kurds, as reported by Helsinki Watch. In his reply on November 22, 1991, Secretary Baker argued that Helsinki Watch's accusations of arbitrary use of force by Turkish security forces should not be viewed in a fragmentary way; instead, it should be examined in the context of the increasing number of terrorist assaults in that country. Baker went on to stress that Turkey is a secular country, and its constitution guarantees equality of all its citizens before the law, irrespective of their ethnic, religious, or racial backgrounds. Baker also was certain that there were no prohibitions whatsoever in Turkey regarding the public use of Kurdish or the publishing of journals in the Kurdish language.<sup>90</sup>

In early 1994, Hamilton brought back the Kurdish question in Turkey in an exchange of letters with the State Department by asserting that a viable solution to Kurdish unrest had to take into account the political and social needs of the Kurds. Peter Tarnoff, Acting Secretary, answered that, in principle, the United States government agreed with Hamilton's propositions, and thus continued to advise Turkey to seek political and social solutions to the Kurdish question, as opposed to a purely military settlement.<sup>91</sup>

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<sup>90</sup> Meho, *The Kurdish Question in U.S. Foreign Policy*, 198-199.

<sup>91</sup> Meho, *The Kurdish Question in U.S. Foreign Policy*, 248-249.

The U.S. desire for a politico-social solution to the Kurdish puzzle, without any detailed analysis of what exactly a politico-social solution actually meant, had already been mentioned in a Voice of America (VOA) editorial, aired on June 18, 1993, which reflected the views of the United States government on the Kurdish question in Turkey. The VOA editorial pointed out that, when the Secretary of State met with President Demirel and other Turkish officials, he underlined the importance of improving the country's human rights record and the treatment of its Kurdish minority. The editorial mentioned that the United States was satisfied by recent reforms undertaken by the Turkish government, which sought to strengthen the human rights regime in the country and grant the Kurds their cultural rights. The VOA voiced the opinion that the long-term solution to the Kurdish question should be based on political and not solely military means.<sup>92</sup>

But as the situation in southeast Turkey deteriorated, Congress became more sensitive to the plight of the Kurdish community. The Turkish Human Rights Compliance Act, which was introduced into Congress in March 1995, sought to deal with a wide range of issues of Turkish interest, such as reported human rights abuses, the Turkish blockade of humanitarian assistance to Armenia, Turkey's unwillingness to seek a viable solution to the Cyprus question, the non-recognition of the existence of a Kurdish minority in Turkey, and the unabated harassment of the Turkish Christian minority. The legislators threatened to withhold \$500,000 a day in U.S. assistance until Turkey took positive steps toward resolving all of the mentioned issues. The Turkish Human Rights Compliance Act failed to attract a majority vote.<sup>93</sup>

Also, the U.S. Congress exerted pressure on the White House to oppose the prospect of Istanbul holding the 1999 summit of the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe (OSCE), arguing that Turkey had no respect for human rights and the commands of international law. Assistant Secretary of State for European Affairs Marc Grossman disagreed with the Congressional recommendations and insisted that the

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<sup>92</sup> Meho, *The Kurdish Question in U.S. Foreign Policy*, 249-250.

<sup>93</sup> *Ibid.*, 275-277.



Istanbul OSCE summit was a great opportunity to discuss human rights issues and democratic rule in a state that sought to meet the OSCE standards.<sup>94</sup>

### **3. Rhetoric by State Department Officials**

In their dealings with the press, U.S. officials usually opined that constitutional reforms in Turkey were promising regarding its human rights record; however, throughout the 1990s, Turkey denied State Department officials or representatives of international non-governmental organizations free access to the Kurdish region. Data collected by the U.S. Embassy in Ankara concerning the Kurdish insurgency were rarely based on reports from those who had actually traveled across the area of interest.<sup>95</sup> Nevertheless, Richard Holbrooke, Assistant Secretary of State for European affairs, called Turkey a frontline state. In March 1995, Holbrooke stated that Turkey “stands at the crossroads of almost every issue of importance to the U.S. on the Eurasian continent.”<sup>96</sup>

During a visit to Turkey, the Assistant Secretary of State asserted that nobody could deny the importance of human rights; however, the rights issue should not cause a rift in U.S.-Turkish relations.<sup>97</sup> Holbrooke’s pro-Turkish stance was backed in the summer of 1995 by General John M. Shalikashvili, chairman of the U.S. Joint Chiefs of Staff, who argued that the Turkish army “was moving forward with new measures aimed at enhancing Turkish democracy and human rights.”<sup>98</sup>

Assistant Secretary Holbrooke apparently followed the principles of realism in international relations regarding the importance of Turkey to America’s interests; however, there were other officials with quite different ideas. For example, when Deputy Assistant Secretary of State John Kornblum was asked in 1996 how destruction of

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<sup>94</sup> Commission on Security and Cooperation in Europe, *The Road to the OSCE Istanbul Summit and Human Rights in the Republic of Turkey*, Hearing before the Commission on Security and Cooperation in Europe, 18 March 1999.

<sup>95</sup> McKiernan, *The Kurds*, 160.

<sup>96</sup> Alan Makovsky, “U.S. Policy toward Turkey: Progress and Problems,” in *Turkey’s Transformation and American Policy*, ed. Morton Abramowitz (New York: The Century Foundation Press, 2000), 224.

<sup>97</sup> *Ibid.*, 253.

<sup>98</sup> Michael M. Gunter, *The Kurds and the Future of Turkey* (New York: St. Martin’s Press, 1997), 106.

property in Turkey differed from that in Iraq, he said that “if you’re in a village, there’s no difference whatsoever.”<sup>99</sup> In 1998, Deputy Secretary of State Strobe Talbot asserted that

the United States supports Turkey's right to defend itself against terrorists...But we also believe, as do many Turks, that there can be no solely military solution to the problems that continue to plague Turkey's southeast, and that any enduring answer to Turkey's Kurdish question will depend on the willingness of the Turkish government to safeguard the human rights of all the people of Turkey...countries which trample the rights of their citizens end up paying a price in terms of political viability and stability of the state itself. When the U.S. talks to its friends, it tries to be respectful of their sovereignty, yet also tries to couch the argument in terms of *realpolitik*, as well as what might be called *moralpolitik*.<sup>100</sup>

Talbot believed that there could be no trade-offs between security and human rights concerns, because the persecution of the Kurdish minority in Turkey would eventually destabilize the country and undermine the strategic interests of the United States.<sup>101</sup>

In spring 2000, after the arrest of Ocalan in Kenya, Talbot wrote that the recent developments made the prospect of a peaceful solution to the Kurdish issue more realistic. The Deputy Secretary of State argued that the fate of the PKK leader had made many Kurds realize that waging guerilla warfare against their own state could not possibly secure their basic rights, while the political establishment in Turkey now understood the futility of a solely military solution to Kurdish nationalism.<sup>102</sup>

Indeed, Ocalan’s arrest led many officials in the U.S. administration to believe that this was a real opportunity for reconciliation between the Turkish state and its

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<sup>99</sup> Randal, *After Such Knowledge, What Forgiveness?*, 259.

<sup>100</sup> Strobe Talbot, comment on “U.S.-Turkish Relations in an Age of Interdependence,” The Washington Institute for Near East Policy, comment posted October 14, 1998, <http://www.washingtoninstitute.org/templateC05.php?CID=1222> (accessed January 25, 2008).

<sup>101</sup> Katerina Dalacoura, *Engagement or Coercion? Weighting Western Human Rights Policies Towards Turkey, Iran and Egypt* (London: The Royal Institute of International Affairs, 2003), 15.

<sup>102</sup> Strobe Talbot, “Self-Determination in an Interdependent World,” *Foreign Policy* 118 (2000): 158.

Kurdish minority. Just a month after the arrest, Harold Koh, Assistant Secretary of State for Democracy, Human Rights and Labor, stated before the Commission on Security and Cooperation in Europe that

enduring solution lies in the expansion of democracy, including full democratic political participation by all Turkey's citizens, and protection of their human rights...we continue to urge the Government of Turkey to make systemic changes....<sup>103</sup>

Koh asserted that what the majority of the Kurds really wanted was freedom to live according to their own traditions and culture. Therefore, Koh argued that, if the Turks decided to grant the long-awaited cultural and linguistic rights to the Kurds, the Kurds "would have more of a stake in the country's future."<sup>104</sup>

#### **4. U.S. Support on the Operational Level**

Although the Kurdish uprising in southeast Turkey was virtually ignored by the U.S. media throughout the 1980s and 1990s, the U.S. military has been instrumental in supporting the Turkish fight against the PKK. An American corporal who was working for the U.S. Air Force on a Turkish military base revealed that American personnel processed intelligence concerning the Kurdish insurgency and provided data to the Turkish Military Police (TMP). The corporal went on saying that "we get names, locations, and other information on the enemy and the TMP breaks down the doors of the safe houses where the terrorists are hiding."<sup>105</sup>

When the Western forces left Iraq in the spring of 1991, they left teams of U.S., French, British, and Turkish officers at the Military Command Center (MCC) in the Iraqi town of Zakho, as a way to direct the activities of Operation Provide Comfort (OPC). Soon, security issues on both sides of the border line became intertwined as the United States and Turkey forced the Iraqi Kurds to support the fight against the PKK. The 1991 Gulf War had "isolated" the Iraqi Kurds from Saddam's repressive regime, but had also made Turkey's leverage over their fate manifest. So, if the Iraqis rejected collaboration

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<sup>103</sup> Commission on Security and Cooperation in Europe, *The Road to the OSCE Istanbul Summit*, 12.

<sup>104</sup> Ibid.

<sup>105</sup> McKiernan, *The Kurds*, 26.

with the Turks, necessary food and medical supplies could be delayed indefinitely on the Turkish borders. Moreover, the Iraqi Kurdish leadership relied on Turkey for visas to travel to Europe and the United States.

The MCC proved instrumental in intelligence gathering against PKK's operations in northern Iraq. Also, U.S. intelligence-gathering aircraft (AWACS), which operated in the area in the context of OPC, would have a Turkish intelligence officer on board who relayed relevant information to Turkish ground stations. U.S. fighter jets also provided information about PKK militants' positions. A U.S. F-15 pilot admitted that there were cameras on his jet that frequently photographed the positions of PKK insurgents in the mountains.<sup>106</sup>

Despite the valuable support of the U.S. armed forces against the Kurdish insurgency, there were many Turkish officers who suspected that the Americans were secretly assisting the PKK guerilla forces in Iraq. Indeed, in 1992, a Turkish General was reported warning the Americans that his forces would not hesitate to shoot down U.S. air assets if they were found within the theater of operations. According to General Richard Hawley, then-U.S. Commander of Operation Provide Comfort, the Turkish army claimed that ground markings in the form of a letter T, traditionally used by U.S. helicopters for landing, had been discovered in remote PKK camps in northern Iraq, leading the Turks to the conclusion that the Americans were actively supporting the PKK by evacuating its wounded fighters. General Hawley stressed that the Turkish allegations were totally unfounded, and he himself viewed the PKK as a terrorist group and an enemy of the United States.<sup>107</sup>

The Turkish establishment's suspicions vis-à-vis U.S. policies in Iraq derived from the famous "Sevres syndrome" which has haunted the Kemalists since the War of Turkish Independence. Despite numerous American assurances that the United States supported the territorial integrity of the Turkish Republic, many in the country's political

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<sup>106</sup> McKiernan, *The Kurds*, 65.

<sup>107</sup> McKiernan, *The Kurds*, 82.

establishment doubted that this was Washington's real agenda.<sup>108</sup> The interest of the United States in the protection of the Iraqi Kurds and its resolve to launch Operation Provide Comfort led students in the Turkish War College to argue that

the Allied forces exploit the ongoing Operation Provide Comfort, with the aim of carving out an autonomous zone for the Kurds of northern Iraq, an attempt that inevitably undermines Turkey's territorial integrity, and eventually aims at dismembering the Turkish Republic.<sup>109</sup>

Suspicion over U.S. secret strategic designs for Turkey increased even further when, in late 1998, Washington succeeded in reconciling the differences between Barzani and Talabani's parties and brought an end to the Kurdish civil war that had devastated northern Iraq since the mid-1990s. The two men signed an agreement whose references to a federal political system in Iraq forced Turkey to protest vigorously.<sup>110</sup>

## **5. U.S. Support through Arms Sales**

Excessive arms sales to Turkey have also been considered tangible proof of U.S. support for the Turkish anti-PKK campaign. During his testimony before the Subcommittee on International Operations and Human Rights, House International Relations Committee, William Hartung, an analyst at the World Policy Institute, argued that from the mid 1980s to the mid 1990s, American companies sold Turkey \$9.4 billion in weapons because of the Kurdish insurgency. In his words, it was "far and away the biggest use of weapons and most aggressive use anywhere in the world."<sup>111</sup> During the same period, the United States gave Turkey \$5 billion in military assistance, part of which was used for arms purchases from U.S. companies.<sup>112</sup>

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<sup>108</sup> Cengiz Candar, "Some Turkish Perspectives on the United States and American Policy toward Turkey," in *Turkey's Transformation and American Policy*, ed. Morton Abramowitz (New York: The Century Foundation Press, 2000), 124.

<sup>109</sup> Ertugrul Kurkcu, "The Crisis of the Turkish State," *Middle East Report* 199 (1996): 3.

<sup>110</sup> Marcus, *Blood and Belief*, 248.

<sup>111</sup> William D. Hartung, "The Role of U.S. Arms Transfers in Human Rights Violations: Rhetoric Versus Reality," Testimony before the Subcommittee on International Operations and Human Rights, House Committee on International Relations, March 7, 2001 <http://www.worldpolicy.org/projects/arms/reports/testimony030701.htm> (accessed January 17, 2008).

<sup>112</sup> Ibid.

Kevin McKiernan has also revealed that U.S. arms were transferred to the Turkish army and then to southeast Turkey without any oversight by the Congress. Specifically, in 1992 and 1993 the Pentagon approved the shipment of considerable amounts of heavy weapons to Turkey under the provisions of a 1990 treaty which placed restrictions on the post-Cold War conventional forces in Europe. The shipment included over 1,509 tanks, 54 fighter planes, and 28 attack helicopters to Turkey. There was never any Congressional debate on these arms transfers.<sup>113</sup> Amnesty International exerted pressure on the Clinton administration to restrict arms sales to Turkey on the grounds of its poor human rights record; however, the administration rejected proposals to make arms sales dependant on human rights reports.<sup>114</sup>

Nevertheless, in May 1994 the House Appropriations Committee proposed legislation which restricted the assistance funds available to Turkey, and also made twenty-five percent of the annual aid package dependant on verified improvements on Turkey's human rights record. In July, a number of Senators proposed restrictions on the use of any American-made military equipment for internal security purposes. The Turkish government expressed its disappointment, and argued that the implementation of such restrictions would only benefit the terrorists and would deprive Ankara of the necessary means to fight against the insurgents.

The Turkish reaction and Prime Minister Ciller's personal appeal to President Clinton resulted in the lifting of the proposed restrictions concerning the internal use of U.S. military equipment. However, not all restrictions were lifted. Ultimately, the Foreign Operations Appropriations Act for fiscal year 1995 made ten percent of the principal amount of direct loans (Foreign Military Financing-FMF) for Turkey dependant on a report by the State Department that would evaluate the alleged human rights abuses in southeast Turkey and the role of U.S.-made equipment in those abuses.<sup>115</sup> Turkey reacted by stating that it did not accept conditional aid packages, and therefore refused to claim the ten percent part of the aid.

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<sup>113</sup> McKiernan, *The Kurds*, 122.

<sup>114</sup> Ibid.

<sup>115</sup> Kemal Kirisci and Gareth M. Winrow, *The Kurdish Question and Turkey: An Example of a Trans-State Ethnic Conflict* (New York : RoutledgeCurzon, 1997), 175.

Directed by the Congress to investigate continuing reports that U.S.-made armament was extensively used against civilians in southeast Turkey, the State Department concluded its report in mid-1995 in cooperation with the Department of Defense. The State Department's report reaffirmed the important role of Turkey in supporting Western interests in the Middle East, and stressed the traditional U.S.-Turkish friendship and close cooperation between the two countries in the context of NATO. Turkey was still regarded as a frontline country for the West despite the end of the Cold War. The report went on, highlighting the fact that Turkey was the only allied country that faced serious challenges concerning its territorial integrity, and that unhindered U.S. support to overcome these challenges was necessary. The Kurdistan Workers Party (PKK) was described as a brutal terrorist organization, supported by Syria, Iran, and some groups located in Europe, whose goals were Turkey's dismemberment and the destabilization of the northern Middle East. The State Department acknowledged that the Turkish military operations against PKK's separatism included the evacuation or destruction of many Kurdish villages, and had contributed to human rights abuses; therefore, "a more civil-based approach by the Turkish government is required to effectively address the problem in the southeast."<sup>116</sup>

The report confirmed that Turkey had extensively used U.S.-made armament against the PKK, and possibly in support of operations concerning evacuation or destruction of villages. However, the reporting officials found no tangible proof to verify allegations of torture or extrajudicial killings by Turkish security forces involving U.S. equipment. The State Department also argued that the primary aim of the PKK initially was the establishment of a Marxist-Leninist independent Kurdistan which would comprise twenty-two provinces in southeast Turkey, and later, the creation of "greater Kurdistan" by annexing the Kurdish-populated territories of Iraq, Syria and Iran. The report made clear that the United States opposed both PKK's objectives and its terrorism.

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<sup>116</sup> Department of State, Bureau of European Affairs, 95/06/01 *Report on Human Rights in Turkey and Situation in Cyprus*, [http://www.fas.org/asmp/profiles/turkey\\_cyprus\\_1995.txt](http://www.fas.org/asmp/profiles/turkey_cyprus_1995.txt) (accessed January 17, 2008).

## **D. EUROPEAN POLICY AND TURKEY: THE RELATIONSHIP BECOMES COMPLEX**

### **1. The Leverage of the European Parliament on E.U.'s Turkish Policy**

Throughout the 1980s, the imperatives of the ongoing Cold War kept Europe relatively silent regarding the outbreak of the new Kurdish insurgency and the harsh response of the Turkish state. However, in view of its decision to apply for full membership into the European Community in early 1987 (the Europeans had advised the Turks against it), Turkey initiated some reforms in order to make its application more attractive. In that context, in January 1987, Turkey accepted the right of its citizens to appeal to the European Court of Human Rights (ECHR). That development allowed Turkey's Kurds to seek redress through ECHR's legal services for a number of issues, including destruction of property, forced resettlement, and other human rights abuses. Additionally, Prime Minister Ozal introduced a law into the GNA that put an end to the practice of internal exile. Nevertheless, the Turkish application was rejected in 1989, primarily on the grounds of structural weaknesses in the Turkish economy.

At the same time, Kurdish activism started taking root in European capitals. One of its first manifestations occurred in October 1989, when the first international Kurdish conference took place in Paris. The conference was organized by the Paris-based Kurdish Institute, and was sponsored by a human rights organization founded by Danielle Mitterrand, spouse of the then-French President.<sup>117</sup> Danielle Mitterrand was an ardent supporter of Kurdish aspirations and a friend of Kendal Nezan, a Kurdish physicist from Turkey, whom she had helped when he established the Kurdish Institute in Paris in 1982. It was Ms. Mitterrand who alerted her husband to the humanitarian disaster in northern Iraq in the spring of 1991 and induced him to demand coordinated action by United Nations forces and the Americans.<sup>118</sup>

In the early 1990s, when the E.U. initiated the process of negotiations for the Turkish-E.U. customs union accord, the primary concern of the European officials was

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<sup>117</sup> Marcus, *Blood and Belief*, 126.

<sup>118</sup> Randal, *After Such Knowledge, What Forgiveness?*, 60.



that any deal with the Turks had to go through Athens. The Hellenic Republic, member of the E.U. since 1980, had traditionally used its leverage in the European establishment and its veto power as a way to force Turkish concessions on the Cyprus issue and their long-standing bilateral differences. But it was not only Athens that prevented the E.U. from building a positive relationship with Ankara. Berlin had its own reasons to block Turkey's steps toward the E.U. in the 1990s. Indeed, preoccupation with the economic cost of German unification, and fears that Turkey's membership in the E.U. would trigger a new flow of immigrants toward Europe, made Germany skeptical, if not hostile, about Turkey's roadmap to Europe.

E.U. officials had also pointed out from the beginning that the fragility of the Turkish democratic institutions would eventually emerge as a serious obstacle. Indeed, at the 1993 Copenhagen summit, the E.U. member states agreed on a set of criteria that any country wishing to join the European club should meet. According to the Copenhagen criteria, the new member states had to establish

stable institutions that guaranteed democracy, the rule of law, human rights, and respect for the protection of minorities, the existence of a functioning market economy as well as the capacity to cope with competitive pressure and market forces within the Union.<sup>119</sup>

Although the negotiating framework included reforms toward a more democratic rule, the situation of the Kurds and the fact that their different identity was denied by the state were not part of the agenda. It seemed that the Europeans were under the impression that issues such as the repression of the Kurdish minority and the improvement of Turkey's human rights records were intertwined, and therefore no specific mention of the

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<sup>119</sup> Vera Eccarius-Kelly, *From Terrorism to Political Activism in Europe: The Transformation of the Kurdish Diaspora to a Transnational Challenger Community*, The Fletcher School of Law and Diplomacy, April 2002, 164.

Kurdish problem was necessary.<sup>120</sup> That arrangement accommodated Turkey's strategy of continuing to refer to the Kurdish unrest solely as a question of terrorism and not one of minority status.<sup>121</sup>

## **2. Europe's Crackdown against the PKK: The German, Hellenic, and French Cases**

The situation in southeast Turkey came up again in June 1992, when the European Parliament (E.P.) adopted a resolution that declared the PKK a terrorist group and recognized Turkey's right to defend its territorial integrity and the lives of its citizens. However, the European Members of Parliament (MPs) also deplored the overwhelming force used by the security agencies against the Kurdish insurgents.

The German government had traditionally been more critical of Turkey's Kurdish policy than the rest of the European countries. The Bundestag even imposed embargoes on military equipment sales to Turkey in 1992 and 1994, following reports that German-made equipment was regularly used for razing Kurdish villages. Although concerns about human rights abuses played their part in shaping Germany's policy vis-à-vis the Kurds, the presence of about 300,000 Turkish immigrants of Kurdish origin made Germany sensitive to the developments in southeast Turkey.<sup>122</sup>

But in late 1993, the PKK was officially outlawed in Germany after a series of attacks against targets of Turkish interests which occurred in June and November 1993. The German Interior Minister stated that "Germany must not become a battlefield for foreign terrorists."<sup>123</sup> The German authorities also banned thirty-five Kurdish organizations that were affiliated with the PKK, while German police thoroughly investigated their offices and cultural centers. The German crackdown against the PKK resulted in numerous protestations by Kurdish immigrants throughout Germany. For

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<sup>120</sup> Meltem Muftuler-Bac, *Europe in Change: Turkey's Relations with a Changing Europe* (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1997), 96.

<sup>121</sup> Heinz Kramer, "Turkey and the European Union: A Multi-Dimensional Relationship with Hazy Perspectives," in *Turkey between East and West*, ed. Vojtech Mastny and R. Craig Nation (Boulder: Westview Press, 1996), 218-222.

<sup>122</sup> Rubin and Kirisci, *Turkey in World Politics*, 37.

<sup>123</sup> Gunter, *The Kurds and the Future of Turkey*, 103.

example, Kurds blockaded roads and clashed with German police in March 1994; in March 1995, Kurdish activists staged bomb attacks against Turkish interests in many German cities; in the summer of 1995, a hunger strike by 170 Kurds provoked clashes between demonstrators and German security forces.

The unrest in the Kurdish community in Germany forced the government to send a delegation to Damascus in October 1995 in order to hold secret talks with Ocalan. The PKK leader said that he felt sorry that many Kurds had caused problems in Germany, but he noted that “a German Government that supports the Turkish Army and the secret service is, of course, a threat to us.” Ocalan argued that most of the bomb attacks in Germany were staged by the Turkish secret service. He added that he was disappointed that the German had failed to keep the promises they had made to him. He finally warned the German representatives that, if their government continued to attack the PKK’s organizations in Germany, “it might be faced with extreme Kurdish reaction.”<sup>124</sup>

In France, two PKK-affiliated organizations were banned in late 1993. The Interior Minister stated that “these associations are the legal front of the PKK, which in France as in other European countries carries out terrorist or criminal actions which we cannot tolerate on our territory.”<sup>125</sup> These developments led to an emergency meeting of the British, German, and Turkish Foreign Ministers in Ankara in January 1994. The British and German sides emphasized Turkey’s right to fight against activities which threatened its territorial integrity. However, the European Ministers warned Ankara that the elimination of the terrorist threat should not result in widespread human rights abuses.<sup>126</sup>

Although Germany and France tried to forge a common E.U. front against the PKK, Greece opposed a joint E.U. resolution against the Kurdish organization. The government and the press in Greece had been sympathetic to the Kurdish cause since the mid-’80s due to the long-lasting Hellenic-Turkish enmity. Numerous Greek journalists had interviewed Ocalan and had spent days in PKK’s camps in the Bekaa valley. For its

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<sup>124</sup> Gunter, *The Kurds and the Future of Turkey*, 105.

<sup>125</sup> Rubin and Kirisci, *Turkey in World Politics*, 37.

<sup>126</sup> Kirisci and Winrow, *The Kurdish Question and Turkey*, 171.

part, the Hellenic government preferred to underline the human rights abuses against the Kurdish community and the lack of respect for the Kurds' cultural rights; however, Greece never expressed support for the PKK's campaign or to its terrorist tactics.

But Turkish agencies believed that Greece actively supported the PKK. The Turks asserted that, 1) Greek parliamentarians of the Socialist Party had visited Bekaa valley camps in 1988 in order to express their support to Ocalan, 2) the Greek Cypriots were harboring the PKK in southern Cyprus (700 PKK guerillas were based there in camps) and financing its operations, 3) the Greeks supplied the PKK with anti-tank missiles and other explosives, 4) the bomb attacks against Turkey's tourist industry were orchestrated by PKK militants and retired officers of the Greek secret service, 5) the Greek government had placed a refugee camp close to the town of Lavrio at the PKK's disposal, 6) the Hellenic Ministry of Foreign Affairs had provided scholarships to thirty-three PKK members in Greek universities, 7) the Greek government had promised Ocalan that it would establish an Athens-based agency that would deal with arms transfers to the PKK.<sup>127</sup>

### **3. Late 1990s: Deterioration of Turkish-E.U. Relations**

In January 1995, the E.P. reacted to the imprisonment of Kurdish MPs by suspending its working relation with the Turkish Grand National Assembly (GNA), and urged the Turkish authorities to release the legislators. The proceedings of the Turkish-E.U. Joint Parliamentary Commission came to a halt, which was a serious setback in the process of ratifying the Turkish-E.U. Customs Union agreement. The Turkish GNA implemented constitutional reforms in July that granted additional rights to the trade unions but failed to discuss European concerns about the Kurdish question.<sup>128</sup> EU-Turkish relations further deteriorated as a result of the Turkish military operation in northern Iraq in March 1995. The Foreign Ministers of Germany, France, and Spain, as representatives of the E.U., visited Ankara to discuss the deadlock on the Customs Union accord and Turkish intentions regarding the duration of the operations in Iraq. The

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<sup>127</sup> Gunter, *The Kurds and the Future of Turkey*, 111.

<sup>128</sup> Rubin and Kirisci, *Turkey in World Politics*, 41.

Turkish government assured its interlocutors that the military intervention would be short, and would exclusively focus on wiping out PKK camps. In that context, the Turkish Foreign Minister visited other European capitals in order to discuss his government's intentions. According to Philip Robins, by 1995-1996, the Kurdish question had "clearly emerged as a visible and controversial factor in relations between the E.U. and Turkey in the 1990s."<sup>129</sup>

Although the European capitals were eager to accept Turkey's assurances about the duration and purpose of the Iraqi operation, the E.P. criticized the Turkish activities in Iraq, urged the E.U. member states to impose a military embargo on Turkey, and finally, called for a political solution to the Kurdish unrest in Turkey. The European MPs also were critical of Article 8 of the 1991 Turkish anti-terror law, which penalized any written or verbal propaganda or any activity that threatened the indivisibility of the Republic. Nevertheless, in December 1995, pressure from European governments, along with some revisions in the Turkish anti-terror law, convinced the E.P. to ratify the Customs Union Pact by a margin of 343 votes to 149.<sup>130</sup> Pauline Green, leader of the Socialist Group in the E.P., argued that many MPs voted in favor of the ratification only with "sorrow, with heavy hearts, and without enthusiasm."<sup>131</sup>

However, the ferocity of the Kurdish-Turkish conflict in 1996 triggered fresh criticism by the European MPs, who argued that "the political bases for the assent to the customs union had eroded."<sup>132</sup> The E.P. suspended the flow of aid funds to Turkey, with the exception of funds targeting the support of the democratization process in the southeast. Turkey's Kurdish policy had other side effects, too. In April 1995, the Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe proposed that Turkey be expelled from

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<sup>129</sup> Philip Robins, "More Apparent than Real? The Impact of the Kurdish Issue on Euro-Turkish Relations," in *The Kurdish Nationalist Movement in the 1990s*, ed. Robert Olson (Lexington: The University of Kentucky Press, 1996), 128.

<sup>130</sup> Kirisci and Winrow, *The Kurdish Question and Turkey*, 49.

<sup>131</sup> Rubin and Kirisci, *Turkey in World Politics*, 41-42.

<sup>132</sup> Dalacoura. *Engagement or Coercion?*, 21.

the Council if, within two months, it failed to bring its legal system in line with the values of the Council. The Assembly also called for the suspension of human rights abuses against the Kurdish minority.

Such criticism from the Europeans, coupled with their continuous recommendations of a political solution to the Kurdish unrest, led the Turkish establishment and Turkish public opinion to infer that the European Union was favoring, if not sponsoring, the dismemberment of the country. Indeed, in a televised interview, President Demirel revealed that, during his talks with the French Foreign Minister Alain Juppe in March 1995, the French official pointed out that

we believe that the [Kurdish] problem is not just a military one, at the same time it also has political characteristics...Among the public opinion of France, Germany, and Spain and other European countries, there are people who believe that PKK terrorists are struggling for the social and political rights of the Kurds.<sup>133</sup>

President Demirel asserted that European calls for a political solution to the insurgency in the southeast actually meant the granting of autonomy to the “Kurdish” provinces, which in turn would lead to the destabilization of the whole country.

There were other activities in European capitals, undertaken by Kurdish activists whose actions were not hindered by Europe’s liberal-democratic political culture, that outraged Turkey. Specifically, in March 1995, the state-controlled British Broadcasting Council allowed MED-TV, a pro-Kurdish satellite television station, to broadcast its program to Europe and the Middle East from London. In April of the same year, the Kurdish Parliament-in-Exile, which was, according to Turkish and U.S. agencies, a PKK-financed propaganda body, convened in The Hague despite Turkey’s protests. Turkey reacted by recalling its Ambassador to the Netherlands and canceling arms purchases from Europe. This provided the Parliament-in-Exile with headlines in the major European journals, a development that Turkey certainly did not intend to provoke.

But it was the events that followed Ocalan’s arrest in Kenya on February 17, 1999, by Turkish Special Forces that shook the European public and boosted the internationalization of the insurgency in southeast Turkey. Specifically, after the scenes

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<sup>133</sup> Kirisci and Winrow, *The Kurdish Question and Turkey*, 174.

of the PKK leader's capture had been broadcasted around the world, hundreds of enraged Kurdish protesters stormed the Consulate of Israel in Berlin. Three protesters were killed by the guards. Similar incidents took place in other German cities, and also in Britain, France, Belgium, the Netherlands, Austria, Denmark, Sweden, and Italy, where Kurds attacked the Greek and Kenyan Consulates. There were some cases where the protesters occupied the consulates for days, keeping their personnel hostage.<sup>134</sup> The trial of Ocalan and the suspension of the PKK's activities were welcomed by the European capitals. However, the majority of European political analysts were hardly assured that the war against Kurdish nationalism in Turkey was over.

#### **4. The Kurdish Diaspora in Europe**

It was the 1990s when the Kurdish Diaspora decided to pursue the Europeanization of the Kurdish question in Turkey and Iraq, since neither country seemed receptive to ideas of democratic rule and respect of human rights. Supported by numerous international human rights organizations, the Diaspora lobbied the E.U. institutions in order to force them to become more involved in the Kurdish conflict, and to place the issue of human rights norms at the top of E.U.-Turkish negotiations. The Diaspora's campaign coincided with the strengthening of the human rights regime in Europe, and the increased sensibility of center-left governments - most governing coalitions in E.U. countries were led by center-left parties throughout the '90s - toward human rights abuses.

E.U. expert John McCormick argued that, in the early 1990s, there were approximately 3000 interest groups based in Brussels whose role was to lobby the European Commission or the E.P. and influence E.U. policies.<sup>135</sup> The Kurdish Diaspora understood the complexity of the decision-making process in the European establishment, and knew that it could influence decisions only if it would function within the system. In that context, the Diaspora, along with the Hellenic and Cypriot interest groups, took some

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<sup>134</sup> Eccarius-Kelly. *From Terrorism to Political Activism in Europe*, 18-22.

<sup>135</sup> John McCormick, *Understanding the European Union* (New York : St. Martin's Press, 1999), 139.

credit for the drafting of the E.U.'s 1997 enlargement policy - the so-called Agenda 2000 - which excluded Turkey from the first group of countries that would receive accession invitations.

Kurdish unrest in Turkey and the reported human rights abuses were obviously convenient excuses for placing Turkey, along with Romania and Bulgaria, in a future, second wave of enlargement. But although Romania and Bulgaria became full E.U. members in January 2007, Turkey was still at the very beginning of the negotiating process in early 2008. Nevertheless, Turkey's exclusion from the first round of enlargement disappointed the Turkish elites, and prompted the hardliners to argue that the EU, just like the United States, was in favor of an independent Kurdish state.

## **E. CONCLUSION**

Jonathan Randal has argued that the State Department never formulated an official policy that both encompassed all the Kurdish communities in the Middle East and took into account the large demographic size of the Kurdish people. Instead, it has always considered them as "downtrodden, occasionally troublesome minorities."<sup>136</sup>

The imperatives of the Cold War prevented U.S. criticism of Turkey's Kurdish policies in the 1980s. The Republican administration in Washington and the center-rightist governments in Europe at that time were not really concerned about human rights as an important parameter of foreign policy decisions. But in the '90s, attitudes in the United States and Europe were quite different. The Clinton administration placed human rights and protection of minorities at the top of its foreign policy agenda. The democratic peace theory had been brought to prominence in Washington.

In Europe, landslide victories of center-leftist parties removed most of the conservative governing coalitions, and the European human rights regime entered a period of regeneration. The Maastricht Treaty of 1991, the Copenhagen criteria of 1993, the Framework Convention for the Protection of National Minorities, which entered into force on February 1, 1998, and the advanced role of the E.P. brought human rights to the top of the E.U.'s agenda.

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<sup>136</sup> Randal, *After Such Knowledge, What Forgiveness?*, 149.



Turkey understood that ignoring the human rights concerns of Europe and the Congress was no longer an option. The absence of a powerful Turkish lobby in the United States, in conjunction with the traditional influence of Armenian and Hellenic interest groups on Congress, was another reason for the Turks to be concerned. So certain reforms, even superficial ones, had to be implemented in order to convince Turkey's American and European interlocutors that the rule of law was Turkey's sole yardstick of its policy toward its citizens of Kurdish origin. Katerina Dalacoura has argued that Turkey's reform package of 1995 seemed quite important to the Europeans, but the reform movement faded when the attention of the international community shifted to other developments in the world. The Turks thought that the announcement of impressive reforms, without actually implementing them, would be enough to satisfy the human rights concerns of the United States and Europe.<sup>137</sup>

On the other hand, the size of the Turkish economy, the geo-strategic importance of Turkey's location in conjunction with the growing engagement of the U.S. in the Middle East, and prospects of lucrative arms deals to meet the needs of the Turkish army meant that Europe and the United States could not afford to marginalize Turkey solely on the grounds of its poor human rights record. Apodaca and Stohl talk about the contradictions between rhetoric and practice in U.S. foreign aid policy. They argue that

human rights do play a role in the decision of who receives U.S. bilateral foreign assistance, and how much they are allotted. But other national security interests play a more prominent role. Countries perceived to be of vital importance to U.S. national security...receive aid regardless of their human rights records.<sup>138</sup>

In that context, Europe sought a carrot-and-stick policy that would keep Turkey on the periphery while it facilitated the gradual improvement of its human rights record and its treatment of the Kurdish community there. However, Europe's inability to decide whether Turkey's accession to the E.U. was vital to European interests, and the endless debate about whether Turkey culturally belonged to Europe, made Turkey skeptical of

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<sup>137</sup> Dalacoura, *Engagement or Coercion?*, 20.

<sup>138</sup> Dalacoura, *Engagement or Coercion?*, 4.

Europe's agenda. As the prospect of a swift process of accession to the E.U. became blurred in the late 1990s, European pressure on Turkey to improve its human rights lost its dynamic.

In the United States, the rhetoric of State Department officials also vacillated between two different attitudes. On the one hand was Holbrooke's realist perspective, with its full support of Turkey and its de-emphasis on the importance of human rights principles, based on U.S. strategic interests in the wider area. On the other hand was the liberal perspective of Talbot, characterized by greater emphasis on democracy, and critical of Turkey's poor human rights record and its inability to safeguard the cultural rights of its Kurdish minority.

## **IV. THE TURKISH KURDISH QUESTION AFTER THE EARLY 2000S**

### **A. INTRODUCTION**

The arrest of the PKK leader in 1999 and his renunciation of armed resistance against the Turkish state led the group's cadre to suspend its guerilla operations. Some of the militants turned themselves in, while others decided to leave Turkey and seek refuge in northern Iraq. As life in the southeast started gradually to return to normal, the Turkish establishment focused on the country's European perspective.

This chapter shows that Turkey's concessions to the Kurdish community in the 2000s were moderate and piecemeal and certainly did not undermine the unitary character of society. Turkey, motivated by the prospect of full E.U. membership, implemented an array of reforms, some of which challenged old notions of Kemalist nationalism. The European establishment embarked upon a strategy of intense socialization with Turkish elites in order to make the Turks understand what norms were either acceptable or unacceptable to the E.U., and what structural reforms Turkey had to make in order to join the European club. Moreover, the official Turkish-E.U. accession talks made clear that Europe understood Turkey's Kurdish question as an issue of denied cultural rights, as opposed to intentional forced assimilation of an ethnic group.

As far as Turkish-U.S. relations were concerned, after the 2003 tensions, the research in this chapter reveals that both countries soon realized the importance of a strong bilateral relationship. Despite its initial skepticism, the United States supported Turkey's military operations in Iraqi Kurdistan against PKK positions in February 2008. The Bush administration realized that Turkish patience with the PKK's attacks from its Iraqi safe haven had been exhausted, and failure to provide credible assistance on the PKK front could seriously destabilize the U.S.-Turkish relations. Although the academic community had long estimated that a massive Turkish operation in northern Iraq would cause a rift in Turkish-U.S. and Iraqi Kurds-U.S. relations, nothing of that sort happened. This chapter's analysis of the U.S.-Turkish relations in the 2000s demonstrates that,

despite U.S. rhetoric concerning human rights and the treatment of the Kurds, the United States, in line with the rationalists' approach, kept viewing Turkish-U.S. strategic partnership as vital to America's interests.

## **B. TURKISH DOMESTIC POLITICS: THE POLICY OF CONCESSIONS**

### **1. Recognition of the "Kurdish Reality"**

In late 2002, Turkey lifted the state of emergency over the last two Kurdish provinces in the southeast.<sup>139</sup> The GNA enacted the Reintegration Law in July 2003 which offered amnesty for some of the Kurdish combatants. Specifically, PKK militants who were eager to surrender to state authorities and provide information on PKK camp locations or the whereabouts of Kurdish leaders still at large were granted reduced sentences. Only those PKK members who had not taken part in armed attacks were eligible for full amnesty. Although the law was supposed to stay in force for a limited period of six months, the Turkish authorities insisted that it nevertheless was quite successful. However, the establishment failed to mention that the majority of those who sought to take advantage of the law were prisoners as opposed to active militants.<sup>140</sup>

Meanwhile, the gradual normalization of life in the southeast brought the issue of internally displaced persons to the fore. Kurdish groups and non-governmental organizations in Turkey often argue that the conflict in the southeast has led to the displacement of over three million Kurds. These organizations have accused the Turkish state of actively hindering the return of the Kurdish villagers in various ways, most important of which is the maintenance of the institution of village guards. More than 50,000 guards were still employed by the state in late 2004, while the arbitrary conduct of their duties and their strong opposition to the return of the displaced persons remained a source of friction in the Kurdish countryside.

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<sup>139</sup> Joost Jongerden, *The Settlement Issue in Turkey and the Kurds: An Analysis of Spatial Policies, Modernity and War* (Boston: Leiden, 2007), xxii.

<sup>140</sup> Kerim Yildiz, *The Kurds in Turkey: EU Accession and Human Rights* (London: Pluto Press, 2005), 115.

Meanwhile, constitutional reforms in mid-2003 permitted Turkish citizens to speak, broadcast, and receive education in “local dialects.” Although the authorities were slow in implementing the provisions of the new regulations, many private tuition centers in Istanbul and the southeast were granted permission to include Kurdish language courses in their curriculum. On 9 June 2003, *Our Cultural Riches*, the first ever program in Kurmanji, was broadcast by the National Turkish Television. Within a week, a similar program was aired in Zaza. A cultural earthquake had shaken the foundations of Kemalist Turkey.<sup>141</sup>

However, considerable restrictions remained. The maximum duration of broadcast Kurdish programs on radio and television are 60 and 45 minutes per day respectively. They may only contain news and traditional music but no films. Local stations cannot broadcast Kurdish programs without permission from the National Institute of Statistics. The Institute is supposed to examine their audience ratings before they can receive authorization to broadcast, a procedure which has been widely used to delay the launching of local Kurdish television stations. As far as the teaching of Kurdish is concerned, courses may only last for ten weeks.<sup>142</sup>

The token concessions of the Turkish government to its Kurdish community did not significantly alter the “deep state’s” view of the pro-Kurdish political parties, which were still viewed as carriers of political extremism. In March 2003, the Constitutional Court banned the pro-Kurdish People’s Democracy Party (HADEP) on charges of providing support to the PKK. Tens of HADEP’s leading members also received a five year prohibition from participating in politics.

Along with the careful steps of the state vis-à-vis the cultural rights of the Kurds, the political establishment made regular references to the Kurds’ secondary identity. Former President Ahmet Sezer often commented about the secondary identity of the Kurds, arguing that “the Turkish state has no problem with secondary identities of the people in Turkey. After all, in the view of the state secondary identities constitute the

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<sup>141</sup> Chris Morris, *The New Turkey: The Quiet Revolution on the Edge of Europe* (London: Granta Books, 2005), 105.

<sup>142</sup> Yildiz, *The Kurds in Turkey*, 70.

riches of our country.”<sup>143</sup> In 1999, Sezer, as the head of the Turkish Constitutional Court, criticized the undemocratic nature of the country’s constitution. He argued that freedom of speech was not secure in Turkey, as “crimes of thought” abounded. Surprisingly, Sezer also criticized the state’s restrictions on the use of the Kurdish language.<sup>144</sup> In line with the former President’s rhetoric, Prime Minister Erdogan has also offered that

in this country we have such ethnic elements as Kurds, Lazes, Caucasians, Georgians, and Albanians. These are secondary identities. We have one single primary identity; that is the citizenship of Turkish Republic...In Turkey, Kurd is married to Turk...they have all become like flesh and nail....<sup>145</sup>

## **2. The Turkish-PKK Clash Resumes**

The relaxation of the cultural restrictions on the Kurdish community did not satisfy the PKK, now known as the People’s Congress of Kurdistan (Kongra-Gel), whose leadership stated on June 1, 2004, that unless the state granted full amnesty to the Kurdish militants, PKK operations would resume. Turkey had no intention of negotiating with Ocalan’s successors; thus, fighting resumed in the southeast.

In April 2007, General Buyukanit, chief of the Turkish General Staff, described the strategy of the army against the resurgent PKK. The general argued that Turkey’s anti-PKK policy would be successful only if the military and civilian leadership were united and determined to conduct the anti-terror operations, and they focused on neutralizing the external sources of support to the Kurdish group. General Buyukanit stressed that Turkey should launch a psychological offensive and wipe out the PKK’s self-confidence.<sup>146</sup>

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<sup>143</sup> Metin Heper, *The State and Kurds in Turkey: the Question of Assimilation* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan Press, 2007), 131.

<sup>144</sup> Michael M. Gunter, “Ocalan’s Capture as a Catalyst for Democracy and Turkey’s Candidacy for Accession to the European Union,” in *Kurdish Identity: Human Rights and Political Status*, ed. Charles G. MacDonald and Carole A. O’Leary (Gainesville: University Press of Florida, 2007), 38.

<sup>145</sup> Heper, *The State and Kurds in Turkey*, 131.

<sup>146</sup> Walter Posch, “Crisis in Turkey: Just Another Bump on the Road to Europe?,” *European Union Institute for Security Studies*, no. 67 (2007): 39.

On October, 18, 2007, the GNA authorized the Turkish government to launch military attack against the PKK's camps in Iraq whenever that was deemed necessary. Turkey had already massed about 100,000 troops along the Turkish-Iraqi border, supported by strike helicopters and tanks. On November, 28, 2007, Prime Minister Erdogan stated that the Council of Ministers had authorized the Turkish army to launch its offensive in northern Iraq; however, he refrained from clarifying whether the intervention would be immediate.<sup>147</sup> Indeed, the cross-border operation was launched on February 21, 2008 and lasted for a period of less than two weeks.

### **C. U.S. POLICY AND TURKEY: THE STRATEGIC PARTNERSHIP IN TURMOIL, AND THE U.S. – IRAQI KURDS ALLIANCE**

#### **1. Coolness and Rapprochement after the 2003 Iraq War**

In the State Department's 2000 Annual Report, Turkey was commended for its successes in combating terrorism, along with Algeria and Spain. From Ankara, U.S. Ambassador Robert Pearson argued that Turkey was the U.S.'s best friend and ally in its struggle to eradicate terrorist groups throughout the world. The ambassador added that the experience of the Turkish army in fighting Kurdish insurgents in the southeast should be utilized by the U.S. authorities.<sup>148</sup>

However, although both Turkey and the United States continued to share mutual interests in the post-Cold War era, the solid base of bilateral cooperation against the Soviet threat had ceased to exist; therefore, U.S.-Turkish relations had become more unstable and unpredictable. The uncertainties of the cooperation framework were pronounced after the 9/11 attacks. While Turkey, like most of the European countries, was alarmed by the growing unilateralism of the United States, it nevertheless supported Washington's military intervention in Afghanistan by providing ground forces to back the Karzai regime. But when the Americans signaled their determination to bring about regime change in Baghdad, the Turkish government, led by Bulent Ecevit until the

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<sup>147</sup> IN.GR News Agency, "The Turkish Army has the Green Light to Intervene in Northern Iraq," <http://www.in.gr/news/article.asp?lngEntityID=853631> (accessed October 12, 2007).

<sup>148</sup> Noam Chomsky, forward to *The Kurds in Turkey: EU Accession and Human Rights* by Kerim Yildiz (London: Pluto Press, 2005), 21.

autumn of 2002 and Erdogan's Justice and Development Party (AKP) after that November's elections, expressed their reservations regarding U.S. designs in Iraq.<sup>149</sup>

The refusal of the Turkish Parliament in March 2003 to authorize the deployment of U.S. forces on Turkish soil in order to open a northern front against Iraq disappointed the Bush administration and plunged the bilateral relations into turmoil. Turkish concerns about the U.S. intervention in Iraq were based on the view that the territorial disintegration of Iraq along ethnic / sectarian lines had to be prevented at all costs.

Turkey feared that the war in Iraq could cause a power vacuum in northern Iraq, which would be used as a safe haven by the PKK to wage attacks against the Turkish authorities. Additionally, the Turks feared that a possible partition of Iraq would result in the establishment of an independent Kurdish entity to the north. Ankara suspected that such an entity could serve as a model for Turkish Kurdish separatists.<sup>150</sup> Moreover, the Turks were concerned about the safety of the Iraqi Turkmen, their ethnic kin, who are mainly concentrated at the Kurdish north.<sup>151</sup> Turkey's refusal to cooperate with the United States on the eve of the 2003 Iraqi war deprived Ankara of its ability to influence developments in post-war Iraq. Furthermore, U.S.-Turkish relations received a new blow when U.S. forces apprehended eleven Turkish commandos in Iraqi Sulaimaniya on July 4, 2003, accusing them of plotting against the regional government of Kurdistan.<sup>152</sup>

Although U.S.-Turkish relations suffered after Turkey's unwillingness to support the U.S. operations in Iraq, both sides soon signaled their determination to sustain their long-standing links. The AKP government, in addition to its desire to maintain a working relationship with the United States, also suspected that its political enemies could use the deterioration of the bilateral relations as a way to undermine its future and credibility. In

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<sup>149</sup> Bulent Aliriza, "US-Turkish Relations: Another Honeymoon?," *Center for Strategic & International Studies*, (2008) [http://www.csis.org/media/csis/pubs/0801\\_turkey\\_update.pdf](http://www.csis.org/media/csis/pubs/0801_turkey_update.pdf) (accessed March 31, 2008).

<sup>150</sup> "Iraq: Turkey, the deployment of U.S. Forces, and Related Issues," *CRS Report for Congress* <http://bosun.nps.edu/uhtbin/cgisirsi.exe/Fri+Aug+03+20:05:34+2007+/SIRSI/0/520/CRS-RL31794.pdf> (accessed August, 3, 2007).

<sup>151</sup> "Iraq: Regional Perspectives and U.S. Policy," *CRS Report for Congress* <http://www.fas.org/sgp/crs/mideast/RL33793.pdf> (accessed August 3, 2007).

<sup>152</sup> Michael Gunter, "Turkey's New Neighbor, Kurdistan," in *The Future of Kurdistan in Iraq*, ed. Brendan O'Leary, John McGarry and Khaled Salih (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2005), 225.



that context, the Erdogan administration, contrary to the widespread anti-Americanism of Turkish public opinion, sought to restore the U.S.-Turkish bond. This policy was exemplified by frequent high-level visits to Washington.

On the other hand, the Bush administration, after its initial disenchantment with the Turkish non-cooperation strategy, weighed up the advantages of strong U.S.-Turkish relations and reached the conclusion that the normalization of bilateral relations would serve U.S. interests such as the unhindered function of U.S. military bases on Turkish soil.<sup>153</sup> The “rapprochement” was clearly demonstrated by the document entitled “Shared Vision and Structured Dialogue to Advance the Turkish-American Strategic Partnership,” presented by then-Foreign Minister Abdullah Gul and Secretary of State Rice in Washington in July 2006. The purpose of the document was to extend the basis and tools of bilateral cooperation. The two sides decided that the areas of cooperation should be widened and that the bilateral dialogue should include not only military officers and members of the executive branch, but also businessmen, media, civil society, scientists and academicians. The document also underlined the determination of the two countries to counter terrorism, “including the fight against the PKK and its affiliates....”<sup>154</sup>

## **2. The Resurgent PKK Pushes Turkey to Intervene in Iraq**

The build up of Turkish military forces along the border with Iraq during the summer of 2006 and again in June 2007 signaled Turkey’s impatience with the PKK presence in Iraqi Kurdistan. The 2006 build up was addressed by the United States through the appointment of retired General Joseph Ralston as Special Envoy for countering the PKK. His mission was to coordinate with the Turkish and Iraqi authorities in order to eradicate the PKK challenge.<sup>155</sup> The 2007 Turkish military build up demonstrated the Turkish view that the Ralston initiative had failed to eliminate the PKK’s terrorist threat. Ralston resigned in mid-2007.

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<sup>153</sup> Aliriza, “US-Turkish Relations.”

<sup>154</sup> Burak Akcapar, *Turkey’s New European Era: Foreign Policy on the Road to EU Membership* (Lanham, Md: Rowman & Littlefield Publishers, 2007), 147.

<sup>155</sup> Aliriza, “US-Turkish Relations.”

In order to prevent a Turkish invasion in late 2007, President Bush was reported to have authorized a covert, joint U.S-Turkish operation, aiming to neutralize the PKK in Iraq and behead its leadership. The Bush administration believed that the U.S role in this venture could be concealed, and in any case would be denied. The willingness of the Bush administration to engage U.S forces in a risky operation that could endanger the country's alliance with the Kurdistan Regional Government revealed Turkey's ability to use its armed forces as an effective tool of foreign policy and its willingness to challenge U.S arrangements in Iraq.

On November 5, 2007, Turkish Prime Minister Recep Tayyip Erdogan and deputy chief of military staff General Ergin Saygun met President Bush in Washington to discuss the developments in northern Iraq, including the threat by the resurgent PKK. Half a month before the visit, on October 22, PKK militants who were based in Iraqi Kurdistan had attacked and killed twelve Turkish soldiers. This particular PKK attack received wide media coverage and triggered a new public dialogue regarding the situation in the southeast.

Since 2003, due to its opposition to the U.S. intervention in Iraq, Turkey had been deprived of the option of cross-border operations within Iraqi territory in order to suppress fresh Kurdish activism. For nearly four years, the PKK, protected in the northern Iraqi safe haven and ignored by the United States army due to the insurgency in Arab Iraq, managed to re-establish itself, organize its forces and resources, and plan a new campaign against the Turkish state. Furthermore, the Iraqi Kurds were now unwilling to tolerate Turkish operations on their soil or provide any other assistance against the PKK.

Until PKK activism in the southeast reached a climax in October 2007, Washington advised Ankara to show self-restraint and launched initiatives, such as the Ralston mediation, which all proved fruitless. The United States was clearly not prepared to put the Iraqi Kurds' support at risk. However, as the death toll rose in southeastern Turkey, the reluctance of the United States to play an active role in eradicating the PKK

threat from Iraqi Kurdistan came to be seen in Turkey as the root cause of the PKK's new campaign. A 2007 Pew Center poll indicated that only nine percent of Turks had a positive view of the United States.<sup>156</sup>

The U.S. government concluded that it was time to change its policy vis-à-vis Turkey and Iraqi Kurdistan when Turkish public opinion led the AKP government to seek GNA authorization for cross-border military intervention against the PKK. The Bush administration also concluded that, unless Washington actively addressed Turkish concerns over the PKK issue, the anti-American sentiments in Turkey would further intensify; thus, the working relationship with the AKP government and the continuation of the use of the Incirlik air base could be put at risk. Concluding his November meeting with the U.S. President, Erdogan stated that he had "obtained what he wanted." He also added, to the astonishment of the journalists, that he had asked Bush to "choose between Turkey and [Kurdish leader Massoud] Barzani."<sup>157</sup> During the meeting, President Bush was reported to have promised advanced intelligence sharing against the Kurdish group.

Despite the negative polls, the two sides continued their contacts at the highest level. On January 8, 2008, Turkish President Abdullah Gul visited President Bush in Washington. The meeting was supposed to demonstrate the importance of close Turkish-American relations and the fact that U.S policy re-orientation, publicized during the November Bush-Erdogan meeting, was ushering the bilateral relations into a new era. Bush did not hesitate to identify the PKK as a "common enemy" and promise "actionable intelligence" to the Turks, a development that was seen by the press on both sides of the Atlantic as the "green light" for a limited military intervention in northern Iraq by the Turkish army. Bush also repeated that the United States strongly supported the Turkish roadmap to the E.U. by referring to Turkey as "a constructive bridge between Europe and the Islamic world."<sup>158</sup>

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<sup>156</sup> Soner Caqaptay, "The PKK Redux: Implications of a Growing Threat," *The Washington Institute for Near East Policy* <http://www.washingtoninstitute.org/templateC05.php?CID=2681> (accessed January 25, 2008).

<sup>157</sup> Aliriza, "US-Turkish Relations."

<sup>158</sup> Ibid.

U.S. officials revealed that, during the Bush-Gul meeting, the American President mentioned that the solution to the PKK threat could not be just military; rather, the solution should address political, social, and economic grievances in the southeast. Gul dismissed Bush's comments by arguing that Turkey did not need external advice on how to deal with Kurdish terrorism.<sup>159</sup>

The Turkish cross-border operation was launched on February 21, 2008. Visiting Ankara on February 27, Secretary of Defense Robert Gates stated that the duration of the operation should not exceed the timeframe of a week or two. Secretary Gates noted that military action alone could not solve the problem of terrorism in Turkey; he added that "security operations should always be accompanied by political and economic initiatives. A long-term solution is possible only if Turkey addresses the Kurds' grievances."<sup>160</sup> Meanwhile, a day before, the White House representative had mentioned that the United States hoped that the Turkish operation would be short, would focus on the PKK forces, and that there would be no civilian casualties. The White House noted that Ankara's motives were well understood.<sup>161</sup>

#### **D. EUROPEAN POLICY AND TURKEY: THE FIRST STEPS TOWARD FULL E.U. MEMBERSHIP, AND THE EUROPEAN HUMAN RIGHTS REGIME**

When the prospect of E.U. membership became real in the early 2000s, the reform of the constitutional provisions regarding human and minority rights was brought to the top of the political agenda in Turkey. Since the end of 2001, the GNA adopted eleven "E.U. Harmonization Packages" which introduced new legislation or amended existing regulations. For example, the second package of March 2002 lifted the ban on publishing in a language prohibited by law; the package of August 2002 abolished restrictions on the right to learn and broadcast in "languages and dialects traditionally used by Turkish citizens;" the package of June 2003 did away with restrictions on selecting names for the

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<sup>159</sup> Aliriza, "US-Turkish Relations."

<sup>160</sup> IN.GR News Agency, "Gates Visits Ankara and Exercises Soft Pressure for the End of the Northern Iraqi Operation," <http://www.in.gr/news/article.asp?lngEntityID=877087&lngDtrID=245> (accessed February 27, 2008).

<sup>161</sup> IN.GR News Agency, "Gates Visits Ankara."

children; the constitutional amendment package of May 2004 made sure that the provisions of international law on fundamental rights and freedoms would take precedence over contradictory national laws.<sup>162</sup> In total, 490 laws were introduced or amended by the GNA until late 2007.

The necessary reforms that Turkey had to implement in order to fulfill the Copenhagen criteria and harmonize its legislation with E.U. norms were indicated in the European Commission's Accession Partnership document of March 2001. Its short-term goals focused on constitutional guarantees of important civic rights, including freedom of expression, freedom of association, prohibition of torture, abolition of the death penalty, reform of the Turkish legal code in accordance with the European Convention on Human Rights, and removal of all kinds of language restrictions in learning and broadcasting. Turkey was supposed to reach the short-term goals by the end of 2001; however, most of the reforms were implemented no sooner than the end of 2004.

The Turkish government was expected to reach the medium-term goals of the Accession Partnership within the following years, but had to signal its political determination to introduce such reforms during 2001. The medium-term reforms included the ratification of important international human rights conventions and treaties, the recognition of people's right to cultural diversity, and the abolition of the state of emergency in the Kurdish provinces. As an initial step to reform Turkey's civil-military relations along European/western lines, the National Security Council's role should be reduced to a solely advisory one.

The Accession Partnership document triggered an intense political discussion in Turkey. Senkal Atasagun, head of Turkey's National Intelligence Service, argued that the execution of Ocalan would hardly serve the Turkish interests. He also stated that the time had come to allow television broadcasts in Kurdish which would be controlled by the state. While Prime Minister Ecevit publicly supported Atasagun's comments, it was the National Movement Party, a partner in the governing coalition, that rejected the logic of concessions to the Kurds. Reflecting the views of the armed forces, its leader argued that

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<sup>162</sup> Baskin Oran, "The Minority Concept and Rights in Turkey: The Lausanne Peace Treaty and Current Issues," in *Human Rights in Turkey*, ed. Zehra F. Kabasakal Arat (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2007), 53-54.

“it is impossible for Turkey to look favorably upon ‘cultural’ and ‘ethnic rights’ which will only serve to fan the flames of ethnic conflict and discrimination....”<sup>163</sup>

Nevertheless, on October 6, 2004, the European Commission stated that Turkey’s progress was substantial and that the country had met the criteria of initiating accession negotiations. In that context, on December 17, 2004, the heads of member states decided that the long process of Turkish-E.U. negotiations would start in October 2005. However, the Commission’s 2004 report on Turkey failed to make direct references to the Kurdish question. Instead, the Kurdish issue was linked to known human rights violations; thus, the report made clear that, as far as the E.U. was concerned, the Kurdish question was an issue of human rights, as opposed to a matter of minority status and forced assimilation.

The E.U. decision to initiate accession negotiations with Turkey caused aftershocks in the French and German political scenes. In France, then-President Chirac was obliged to declare that France would choose to ratify the Turkish-E.U. accession treaty through a popular referendum. In Germany, then-Chancellor Schroeder was criticized for the uncritical support he offered to the Turks. Angela Merkel’s conservative party stated that a privileged partnership between the E.U. and Turkey was more appropriate, rather than full membership.<sup>164</sup>

## **1. The European Parliament and Turkey**

There were always profound differences of style in the Commission’s and the European Parliament’s treatment of the Turkish candidacy. While the Commission’s reports were more vague and politically correct, the Parliament’s language vis-à-vis Turkey was more direct and specific. For example, in March 2004, the Parliament’s Committee on Foreign Affairs and Human Rights urged the Turkish authorities to embark upon a campaign of reforms that would guarantee the cultural rights of its people, broadcasts in languages other than Turkish, and the socio-economic development of the

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<sup>163</sup> M. Hakan Yavuz, “Five Stages of the Construction of Kurdish Nationalism in Turkey,” in *Kurdish Identity: Human Rights and Political Status*, ed. Charles G. MacDonald and Carole A. O’Leary (Gainesville: University Press of Florida, 2007), 72.

<sup>164</sup> Yildiz, *The Kurds in Turkey*, 25.

southeast. The committee added that all these reforms were crucial for the prosperity and progress of the Kurdish community in Turkey.<sup>165</sup>

Apart from its bureaucratic approach to the Turkish candidacy, the European Parliament sponsored various forums where the significance of the Turkish roadmap to the E.U. on the Kurdish question was addressed. For example, on September 19 and 20, 2005, the European Parliament organized a conference in Brussels under the title “The E.U., Turkey, and Kurds.” The panelists argued that the treatment of Turkey’s Kurdish community was expected to play a decisive role in the country’s endeavor to join the European institution. Hatap Dicle, one of the panelists, a Kurd and former member of the Turkish parliament who had received a fifteen year prison sentence in 1994, stated that the prospect of Turkey’s accession to the E.U. was welcomed by the Kurds. Dicle added that Turkey’s E.U. membership was not a given, but would depend on the progress of the reforms. However, he accused the Turkish authorities of conducting a new “campaign of violence and murder in Kurdish areas” since 2004.<sup>166</sup>

The European Commission against Racism and Intolerance (ECRI), established by the Council of Europe as an independent mechanism for monitoring the performance of its member states on human rights, has also been critical of Turkey’s human rights practices. In its third report, adopted in June 2004, the ECRI noted that Turkey had made significant progress on the protection of human rights by ratifying the International Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Racial Discrimination in September 2002, and the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights (ICESCR) and the UN Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (UNCCPR) in September 2003. However, Turkey expressed a reservation regarding Article 27 of the UNCCPR, declaring that its provisions will be interpreted and applied in Turkey in line with Turkey’s constitution

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<sup>165</sup> Arie M. Oostlander, “Report on the 2003 Regular Report of the Commission on Turkey’s Progress towards Accession,” Committee on Foreign Affairs, Human Rights, Common Security and Defense Policy (2004) <http://www.europarl.europa.eu/sidesSearch/search.do?type=REPORT&language=EN&term=5&author=1282#> (accessed April, 1, 2008).

<sup>166</sup> Ahto Lobjakas, “Turkey: EU Conference Highlights Continued Repression of Kurds,” *RadioFreeEurope* <http://www.rferl.org/featuresarticle/2005/09/97618727-009f-4ac3-8449-d062f5d982e7.html> (accessed January, 25 2008).

and the Treaty of Lausanne.<sup>167</sup> The reservation was widely regarded as a juristic effort by Turkey to satisfy the international community while keeping its policies towards the Kurdish community virtually unchanged. Another reservation on Article 13 of the ICESCR restricted the freedom of parents to educate their children according to their own beliefs and the freedom of citizens or groups to set up educational centers under specific conditions.

The ECRI criticized the fact that Turkey had not yet signed or ratified the UNESCO Convention against Discrimination in Education, the European Charter for Regional or Minority Languages, the Framework Convention for the Protection of National Minorities, and the European Convention on Nationality.<sup>168</sup>

## **2. The Negotiating Framework and the First Progress Report**

During the first half of 2005, the European Commission drafted the Turkish-E.U. negotiating framework. As far as minority and human rights in Turkey are concerned, the negotiating framework provided that

the Union expects Turkey to ... work towards further improvement in the respect of the principles of liberty, democracy, the rule of law and respect for human rights and fundamental freedoms...the implementation of provisions relating to freedom of expression, freedom of religion...and minority rights...The progress will be measured in particular against the following requirements...the stability of institutions guaranteeing democracy, the rule of law, human rights and respect for and protection of minorities....<sup>169</sup>

In that context, the European Commission published its first report concerning Turkey's progress in incorporating the Union's norms in late 2006. The report noted that Turkey had made some progress in the realm of human rights law by ratifying the second optional protocol to the UNCCPR and Protocol No. 13 of the European Convention on Human Rights (ECHR), both referring to the abolishment of the death penalty. Turkey

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<sup>167</sup> "Third Report on Turkey," *European Commission against Racism and Intolerance* (2004) [http://www.coe.int/t/e/human\\_rights/ecri/1-ecri/2-country-by-country\\_approach/turkey/Turkey%20third%20report%20-%20cri05-5.pdf](http://www.coe.int/t/e/human_rights/ecri/1-ecri/2-country-by-country_approach/turkey/Turkey%20third%20report%20-%20cri05-5.pdf) (accessed May 19, 2007).

<sup>168</sup> "Third Report on Turkey," *European Commission against Racism and Intolerance*.

<sup>169</sup> "Negotiating Framework," [http://ec.europa.eu/enlargement/pdf/st20002\\_05\\_TR\\_framedoc\\_en.pdf](http://ec.europa.eu/enlargement/pdf/st20002_05_TR_framedoc_en.pdf), (accessed April 28, 2007).



had still not ratified Protocol No. 12 of the ECHR concerning the general prohibition of discrimination by state authorities. The country's record on minority rights was quite disappointing. In particular, Turkey continued to deny the existence of national minorities within its borders. The report implied that there were groups in Turkey that could meet the international/European criteria of a minority, and criticized the lack of official dialogue between Ankara and the High Commissioner on National Minorities (HCNM) on the protection of minorities. It was suggested that the agenda of such a dialogue should include the education of minorities, public broadcasting in minority languages, and issues of political representation.<sup>170</sup>

The report also noted the Commission's concerns on the issue of internally displaced persons (IDP), mainly from the Kurdish-populated southeast part of the country, and the lack of progress to put into action the "Return to Village and Rehabilitation Program". The large number of land mines in the southeast, the limited funds provided by the government, the administrative barriers under the guise of security concerns, and the existing institution of village guards were some of the obstacles that discouraged displaced Kurds from returning to their villages.

As to Turkey's concerns over the threat posed by an autonomous Kurdish entity in northern Iraq, the Commission seemed to understand the Turkish anxieties. In that context, its representative stated in mid-2007 that the European Commission did not support the establishment of an independent Kurdish state in northern Iraq. The spokesman of the Turkish Foreign Ministry said that "we are of course in a position to take official statements by the representative of the European Commission seriously."<sup>171</sup>

The supportive stance of the Commission toward the AKP government in its clash with the "deep state" (*derin devlet*) over the presidency, and its lukewarm reaction to the threat of a cross-border operation in northern Iraq in the second half of 2007, encouraged Prime Minister Erdogan in early 2008 to criticize European states for continuing to support the PKK. While delivering a speech at a security affairs conference in Munich,

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<sup>170</sup> "Turkey 2006 Progress Report," *Commission Staff Working Document*, [http://ec.europa.eu/enlargement/pdf/key\\_documents/2006/Nov/tr\\_sec\\_1390\\_en.pdf](http://ec.europa.eu/enlargement/pdf/key_documents/2006/Nov/tr_sec_1390_en.pdf) (accessed April 28, 2007).

<sup>171</sup> Posch, "Crisis in Turkey," 43.

Erdogan argued that the PKK was still active in many European countries under various names. He also asserted that, in just one country, the Kurdish organization had managed to raise five million Euros in a year. Erdogan said that European countries used to let Kurdish terrorists go free without any justification.

## **E. CONCLUSION**

Since the early 2000s, Turkey embarked on an ambitious project of reforms in order to convince its European interlocutors to authorize the initiation of E.U.-Turkish accession talks. The evidence in this chapter demonstrated that the prospect of E.U. membership acted as a catalyst. As the reports from European institutions indicate, Turkey has recently ratified a number of international conventions that are viewed as critical to the protection of the Kurdish identity. Europe's socializing strategy convinced the Turkish elites that substantial reform in the country's human rights regime was the only way to curb the European Parliament's skepticism regarding the Turkish candidacy.

Indeed, important reforms of Turkey's legal and judiciary systems, and some cultural concessions to the Kurds, permitted the initiation of the E.U.-Turkish talks. However, it is still too early to talk about the Europeanization of the Turkish elites; it is premature to infer that these reforms signal profound changes in the Turkish leadership's political thinking. The Turkish reservations on Article 27 of the UNCCPR suggest that Ankara is still reluctant to recognize the existence of a Kurdish minority that deserves special rights. Turkey perceives itself as the cornerstone of European security, and a major regional power that deserves to talk to and negotiate with Europe on an equal basis. Therefore, extreme requests regarding Turkey's roadmap to the E.U. have proved counter-productive, as they caused resentment and invariably assisted the conservative forces (Kemalists) in accusing the Europeans of promoting a secret agenda for the disintegration of Turkey.

The research in this chapter revealed that the Europeans have reached the conclusion that the Kurdish question in Turkey can be solved through human rights reforms. All the official documents related to the E.U.-Turkish accession talks reveal that alignment of Turkey's minority protection regime with Europe's norms and regulations, the so-called *acquis*, is a precondition for full membership. References to autonomy or

other forms of self-administration for the Kurds are nowhere to be found in the official E.U.-Turkish correspondence. Actually, the Kurdish question is not a distinct subject of the bilateral talks; rather, it is indirectly dealt with through the general provisions of the section concerning human rights. In that sense, it is not far-fetched to argue that documented Turkish practices of forced assimilation and cultural repression against the Kurds have been written off, if not legitimized, by the E.U.'s policy.

The post-2003 turmoil in U.S.-Turkish relations brought to the Iraqi Kurds the unprecedented chance to ally themselves with the only superpower in the world. Under U.S. protection, Iraqi Kurdistan gained the status of a de facto autonomous entity and became the living emblem of Kurdish freedom. Meanwhile, Turkey was no longer free to conduct cross-border operations in order to keep the PKK in check. This development permitted the PKK cadre to safely re-organize itself, re-arm and train its militants, and to pose new threats to Turkish authority in southeastern Anatolia after late 2004.

The Turkish establishment soon reached the conclusion that the root cause of the PKK's resurgence was no other than the American occupation in Iraq, which had turned the Iraqi north into a safe haven. U.S. calls for self-restraint and advanced Iraqi-Turkish cooperation in order to eradicate PKK terrorism gradually lost their appeal as the death toll in Turkish Kurdistan started rising. When it became obvious that the Turks had exhausted their patience, the United States agreed to actively support the Turkish operation in northern Iraq through intelligence sharing. The Turkish determination to intervene in American-occupied Iraq made clear to both Europeans and Americans that Turkey is in a position to conduct an independent foreign policy and to protect its vital interests. Clearly, territorial integrity takes precedence over other important interests, including European integration and strong U.S.-Turkish relations.

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## V. CONCLUSION

### A. THE KEMALISTS AND THE KURDS IN TURKEY

Huntington has argued that Turkey - traditionally denying its place in the Middle East, and left out of the core of the European establishment - might choose to pursue the dream of a pan-Turkic world. He has asserted that if Turkey fails join the European club under its own terms, it may “resume its much more impressive and elevated historical role as the principal Islamic interlocutor and antagonist of the West.”<sup>172</sup> In recent years, the traditional Kemalists, best represented by Turkey’s conservative party and the military, have lost a considerable number of political battles, as Erdogan’s “moderate” Islamists have secured a second term in government and elected a leading AKP member as President. However, the Islamists continue to adopt important Kemalist notions, including Turkey’s orientation toward Europe and its unwillingness to recognize the Kurds’ otherness. The Kemalists are not yet ready to sing their swan-song, and far-fetched concessions to the Kurds could undermine the Islamists’ hold on power.

Kemalism may be under assault in contemporary Turkey, but some of its principles, such as nationalism and statism, are still relevant. Beginning in the 1920s, the Kemalists embarked on a project of total separation of religion and state and the forging of a unitary society that rejected people’s loyalty to diverse ethnic roots. The disintegration of the Ottoman Empire, in the aftermath of World War I, and the clauses of the hated Sevres Treaty, the so-called “Sevres syndrome,” led to the violent suppression of early Kurdish nationalism by the Kemalists. In fact, the Kemalist regime sought to assimilate its Kurdish minority and eliminate any trace of its cultural heritage.

Even today, Kemalist conservatism views European and U.S. pressures to grant cultural, political, and linguistic rights to the Kurds as a prelude to a conspiracy against Turkey’s territorial integrity. Proposals from other domestic actors regarding concessions to the Kurds are also rejected as dangerous to the state’s unity. The Kemalists’ resistance to external pressures seems to be in line with the principles of the neo-realist theory in

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<sup>172</sup> Fouad Ajami, “The Clash,” *The New York Times Book Review*, January 6, 2008.

international relations. As discussed in the introduction of this thesis, the neo-realists argue that state interests and preferences derive from objective conditions and the material characteristics of a state. National interests may change according to changes in these conditions and characteristics. Domestic actors agree to socialization processes only when there are benefits, such as promises of rewards for compliance with norms, or threats of sanctions in response to deviations from normative standards. The actors being socialized agree to change their behavior to conform to international norms to the extent that the benefits of compliance are greater than the costs of resistance.

The Kemalists have invariably followed this line of thinking. In the early 1980s, Turkey's military, as the primary proponent of Kemalism, proclaimed itself the guardian of Turkey's Kemalist heritage, introduced a new constitution which restricted political activism, and made itself the supervisor of the country's orientation through the elevation of the National Security Council to the position of most powerful political institution. The ensuing standstill in European-Turkish relations was not of primary concern, as vital national interests, such as the country's political stability, were at stake. However, later in the 1980s, the need for economic integration with Europe led the Turkish establishment to seek closer relations with the E.C.

In the early 1990s, the military viewed President Ozal's initiative to seek some kind of compromise with the Kurds with increasing alarm, but his death soon led to the military taking hold of the situation in the southeast. Later that decade, when Prime Minister Ciller examined the advantages and disadvantages of the Basque model regarding the administration of the Kurdish southeast, the military leaders made clear that they were better equipped to handle such an important issue. In the 2000s, the benefits of full E.U. membership led to reforms in the country's human rights regime, but were moderate and did not challenge the unitary character of the state.

The Turkish establishment has consistently rejected advice to negotiate with the Kurds. Calls for the initiation of a democratic dialogue on the Kurdish question are refused on the grounds that the unrest is led only by terrorists; thus, a democratic state never negotiates with terrorists. Undoubtedly, the ruthless tactics of the PKK, which adopted terrorism as a convenient means to overcome the superiority of the Turkish

army, caused widespread resentment in Turkey, even among the Kurds in the southeast. Ocalan's heavy-handed practices led the Americans and, later, the Europeans, to denounce his group and its agenda. Even though the PKK had made a decisive contribution to the internationalization of the Kurdish question in Turkey, the Marxist-Leninist outlook of the group and its violence turned key actors of the international community against it. Under such circumstances, the PKK had little chance of succeeding in establishing an autonomous or independent entity in southeastern Anatolia.

In general, the Turkish state has been successful in dividing the Kurdish nationalist movement, either through co-optation or excessive repression. The concessions of the state toward the Kurds regarding television broadcasts, the private teaching of Kurdish, and the ratification of international treaties concerning human rights norms are important; however, they should not lead to the conclusion that Turkey is ready to grant excessive minority rights to the Kurds or let them freely debate their ethnic aspirations in public. Turkey's preoccupation with the developments in Iraqi Kurdistan indicates that political freedom for Turkey's Kurds is not on the agenda.

Finally, it is worth noting that there is no single opinion within the academic community regarding the role of Kemalism in dictating the fate of Turkey's Kurds. Metin Heper has argued that the state never sought to forcefully assimilate the Kurds, even during the serious uprisings of the 1920s and 1930s, because Turkey's leaders believed that since Ottoman times, a merging of cultures had taken place as a result of prolonged contact between Kurds and Turks (acculturation). Heper has asserted that when the first Kurdish rebellions took place, the state decided to abandon its centuries-old policy of recognizing the Kurds' otherness. Instead, the state adopted a policy of not recognizing the Kurds' distinct ethnic roots, with the aim of reversing the course of cultural separation. Heper supports his argument by mentioning that denial and non-recognition are two different notions; denial means that empirical facts are rejected, while non-recognition means that empirical facts are not denied, but are tacitly concealed. What many academics term the forced assimilation of the Kurds is actually a non-recognition

of their otherness, which reflects the state's effort to prevent the split between two cultures that have been united since ancient times.<sup>173</sup>

Heper's view is indeed interesting as it seeks to defend Kemalism's nation-building effort and describe Turkey's Kurdish policy through the lens of supposed acculturation. The fact that the Kemalists acknowledged the distinct ethnic roots of the Kurds is verified by their plans to grant limited autonomy to the Kurds in the early 1920s, which are credibly documented. However, even if what Heper asserts regarding the difference between denial and non-recognition is true, he fails to explain why the Turks are in a better position to judge what is best for the Kurds and their fate as a distinct ethnic group. Even though he admits that Kemalism understands the distinct roots of the Kurds, he insists that they can make progress in their lives only if they adopt Turkish as their primary ethnic identity and leave their Kurdish identity in their private domain.

## **B. THE UNITED STATES AND THE KURDS IN TURKEY**

The United States was involved in affairs in the Middle East even before the start of World War II. Primary sources have documented the creation of a strategic partnership between Turkey and U.S. based on the imperatives of the Cold War and the doctrine of Soviet containment. Turkey was labeled by the Americans as a frontline state whose contribution to the surveillance of any activity in the Soviet Union was indispensable. In that context, the United States chose not to criticize Turkey's Kurdish policy in the 1980s, especially when the successes of Ocalan's group started to pose questions regarding the authority of the state in southeastern Anatolia. The Kurdish minority in Turkey was regarded as a potential tool in the hands of the Soviets, if and when they decided to destabilize the Turkish regime.

After the end of the Cold War, in the 1990s, the United States started paying more attention to existing human rights practices, even among its allies. The focus of the U.S. administration on the spread of democracy in the world and the strengthening of the international human rights regime brought tension to U.S.-Turkish relations on many occasions, as State Department reports criticized Turkey's human rights record and

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<sup>173</sup> Metin Heper, *The State and Kurds in Turkey*, 6.



clearly mentioned the Kurdish problem. Simultaneously, the culmination of the bloody clashes in the southeast came under intense scrutiny by international organizations, whose reports about the harsh treatment of the Kurdish population embarrassed the Turkish establishment. Also, the determination of some members of the U.S. Congress to expose Turkey's poor human rights record and its lack of respect toward its Kurdish minority, and their desire to limit Turkey's U.S. aid packages, caused further tension in bilateral relations. However, at no point did the U.S. administration express its favor toward schemes of autonomy or independence for Turkey's Kurds. Instead, the U.S. kept stressing the importance of maintaining the territorial integrity of Turkey, though the Turks were advised to seek a solution that would not be solely military, but would address the political and cultural grievance of the Kurds.

Although the Kurdish problem in Turkey made its appearance in official U.S. circles, the press kept ignoring it. Noam Chomsky has noted that, in the 1990s, there were only a few reports and some op-eds by representatives of international human rights organizations. The climate changed in 2003 after Turkey's rejection of American requests to permit the transit of U.S. forces through Turkish soil in order to establish a northern front in Iraq. Chomsky mentions that the *Boston Globe* and the *New York Times* suddenly started publishing a plethora of articles regarding the appalling persecution of the Kurdish community by the Turks.<sup>174</sup>

The change in U.S. attitude in the 1990s toward the Kurdish question in Turkey is important because Turkey realized that harsh suppression of Kurdish nationalism and the strategy of non-recognition of the Kurdish identity could not further stand international scrutiny. The 1990s were a completely different era, where defense of minority and human rights mattered and the Kemalist practices of the 1930s could not be tolerated any longer. The rhetoric of U.S. officials, contradictory as it was sometimes, convinced the Turkish leadership that some reforms had to be implemented in order to satisfy the sensitivities of its allied partners.

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<sup>174</sup> Noam Chomsky & Gilbert Achcar, *Perilous Power: The Middle East and U.S. Foreign Policy* (Boulder: Paradigm Publishers, 2007), 125.

The primacy of Turkey's strategic value to American interests over human rights concerns regarding the Kurdish minority, according to the rationalist approach in international relations theory, is best exemplified by the decision of the Bush administration in 2007-2008 to support Turkish cross-border operations in Iraqi Kurdistan, as long as they would be limited in time, focused on the PKK's camps and manpower, and would cause minimal collateral damage to the civilian population. The U.S. administration realized that Turkish patience with the PKK's raids from its Iraqi bases had been exhausted, and American failure to provide credible assistance on the PKK front could destabilize its working relationship with the Turks. Contrary to the estimations of the international press and the academic community, the United States supported Turkey's limited cross-border operation of February 2008, without seriously harming U.S. relations with the Iraqi Kurds.

### **C. EUROPE AND THE KURDS IN TURKEY**

There are no great differences between the ways the United States and Europe have approached the Kurdish question in Turkey. Until the fall of the Berlin wall, Turkey's Kurdish policy never really attracted the attention of the European states or the European Community (E.C.). In the E.C-Turkish negotiations of the 1960s concerning Turkey's accession as an Associate Member, the Kurdish question and other human rights concerns were not on the agenda. Instead, the Europeans were primarily interested in the economic terms of the pact, with the issue of immigration flows from Turkey toward the European labor market being the most important of all.

By the 1990s, Europe had changed. Turkey's relations with the E.C. (now known as the European Union, or E.U.) were complicated by a determination on the part of E.U. members to deepen their cooperation, best exemplified by the decision to move the monetary union project forward, the rise to power of center-left governments in the majority of the member-states, the desire to make an adherence to European human rights norms a precondition for future members, and the European Parliament's growing criticism of the treatment of the Kurds.

When the prospect of full E.U. membership became real in late 1999, Turkey decided to implement extensive reforms in the fields of human rights, civic freedoms, and

the legal system, in order to initiate the accession negotiations. The E.U. embarked on a process of intense socialization with Turkish elites, best exemplified by the joint Turkish-E.U. parliamentary groups and the Commission's special teams which undertook the task of screening Turkish laws and regulations in various realms. The socialization was intended to make the Turks understand what norms were acceptable or not to the Europeans, and what short- and medium-term goals Turkey had to achieve. Socialization was also intended to explain the way civil-military relations in Turkey had to be revamped, so that the military would be brought under the democratic control of the civilian authorities (according to the western model).

In that context, the E.U. believed that the gradual reform of the human rights regime and the legal code in Turkey would ultimately bring profound changes in the way various minorities, especially the Kurds, were treated. The Europeans also believed that the consolidation of democracy in Turkey would alleviate traditional Kurdish grievances and would progressively marginalize radical Kurdish groups.

The Kurdish question is generally treated as a human rights problem, as opposed to an issue of forced assimilation and denial of the Kurds' otherness. E.U. representatives, just like many U.S. officials, have occasionally advised the Turks that the solution to the unrest in the southeast cannot be solely military, but has to be one that addresses the cultural grievances of the Kurds and guarantees political representation of their community in the state administration. The banning of Kurdish political parties, based on arbitrary charges regarding affiliation with terrorism and national security, compromises Turkey's image and undermines its European ambitions.

There is validity in the E.U.'s strategy. The consolidation of democracy in Turkey, the revamping of civil-military relations which will restrict the traditional power of the military in dictating state policies, and the recognition of the Kurds' otherness through the granting of their cultural and linguistic rights, can forge a new relationship between Turks and Kurds. However, the E.U. has to make it clear that there is a light at the end of the tunnel for Turkey. The long-lasting debate in Europe about whether Turkey has a place in the European establishment has to end soon. Otherwise, the E.U. will lose its credibility and Turkey will not cross the Rubicon. Huntington's predictions may then come true.

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